

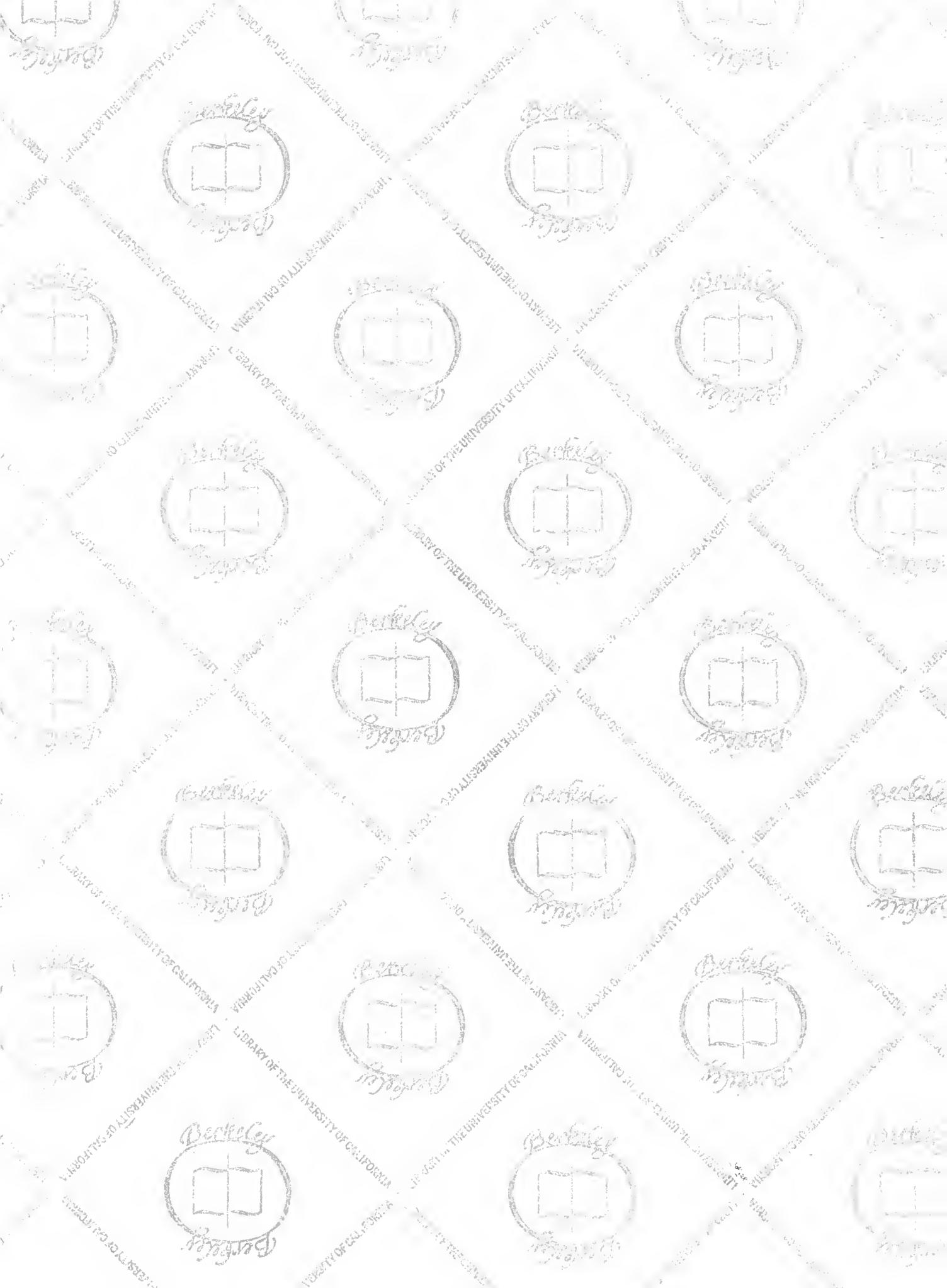
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T. Max Kniesche

SCHROEDER'S CAFE AND THE GERMAN RESTAURANT TRADITION
IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1907-1976

An Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser in 1976

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Mrs. T. Max Kniesche, T. Max Kniesche III,
T. Max Kniesche, T. Max Kniesche II,
1975

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- T. Max Kniesche

INTRODUCTION	i
Early Years in Germany	1
To Sea at Fifteen	5
More Voyages and Adventures	13
An Immigrant in New York	19
Working Across the Continent	24
Finally San Francisco	31
The Bismark Cafe	41
Working and Living in San Francisco	49
"That's When I Got My Start"	53
Prohibition	60
Marriage	63
Buying Schroeder's Cafe	72
Making Improvements	82
Kinds of Food	89
Location, Tips and Diners	94
Changes	103
Christmas Cards and Family Members	107
More Changes	110
Chefs, Waiters, Prices and Women	113
Cleanliness and Cold Glasses	120
Residences and Real Estate	122
Recreations and Vacations	125
Labor Troubles of the 1930s	135
Provisions and Wartime Problems	139
Managing Schroeder's Cafe	145
Restaurant Tour	150
The Decorations	156
Three Generations	169
APPENDIX	171
INDEX	176

INTRODUCTION

T. Max Kniesche is an inseparable part of San Francisco's restaurant tradition, an unusual man who took an obscure small cafe and made it into an institution that has for more than fifty years presented German cuisine to generations of San Franciscans and visitors to the city.

Born in Germany in 1888, he began his career there as an apprentice in a famed resort, and continued it on ships around the world before deciding that his future lay in the United States. First in New York, and then working his way across the country, he learned about the restaurant trade in America. Arriving in San Francisco in 1907, he began the traditional American ascent, starting as a waiter and becoming a partner in a highly successful restaurant. The ascent was interrupted by Prohibition but only briefly, for in 1922 he bought Schroeder's Cafe and began recreating it to a clear image he had in mind. This he completed, and it is fortunate not only that he did so but that his detailed memories of it are here recorded and preserved.

Bright, cheerful, and assured, proud of his accomplishments and of his family, T. Max Kniesche discussed, in speech still reminiscent of his native language, the details of his career and gave an excellent verbal description of the restaurant. He also recorded interesting observations of San Francisco as he saw it from 1907 on, and added a variety of interpretive opinions concerning his adopted city and country in relation to his native land and the world which he saw during his days at sea as a young man.

The interviews were held in 1976 when T. Max Kniesche was 88 years of age, still spry and determined, with excellent powers of recall. The Regional Oral History Office interviews were held in his elaborately furnished home on the west side of Russian Hill, except for the last one at the restaurant. To them were added interpolations from interviews conducted by his grandson, T. Max Kniesche III, in which he reviewed the diary he kept in the early part of the century and also added recollections about events he had earlier told to his family. The transcript was later gone over carefully by T. Max Kniesche, Jr., and T. Max Kniesche III, who continue to carry on the restaurant tradition of their father and grandfather.

The Regional Oral History Office wishes to thank the Kniesche family for the grant which made possible this oral history, one of a continuing group of interviews on the culture and history of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

22 September 1980
Regional Oral History Office
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Old Fashioned Irish Stew
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Roast Pork, Apple Sauce
Smoked Brisket of Beef, Puree of Split Peas
Koenigsberger Klops and Sauerkraut
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Goulash & Noodles

THURSDAY

Wiener Backhuhn
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Holstein Schnitzel
Wiener Schnitzel
Boiled Beef, Spanish or Horseradish Sauce
Baked Spare Ribs and Sauerkraut
Oxtail Sauté and Vegetables
Schweizer Bratwurst

FRIDAY

Baked Chicken, German Style
Sauerbraten, Potato Pancakes
Pig's Knuckle and Sauerkraut
Goulash and Noodles
Koenigsberger Klops
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Early Years in Germany

[Interviewed Autumn 1976]

Teiser: When and where were you born?

Kniesche: I was born in Germany, January 27, 1888. We were nine children. I was the fifth in the group, right out of the middle. My younger days were just hanging around at home, and then I went to school. When I was about twelve years old, I went to work. I got into a lot of mischief, because I was full of pep.

In the morning, before I went to school, I delivered rolls. In Europe they hang their bags outside the doors, and then you put the rolls in the bags. In the afternoon when I came out of school, I had a big dog and a wagon, and I went out of the city and delivered bread.

Teiser: Let me take you back--what town were you born in?

Kniesche: I was born in Naumburg an der Saale, where my father was a mail clerk on the railroad.

Teiser: That was a responsible job.

Kniesche: Yes. And we were nine children, you know, and nine children is a lot of work. So I had to work along.

Teiser: What were your parents' names?

Kniesche: William, and Christine Killian Kniesche.

Teiser: Had both been born in that same area?

Kniesche: Yes, Wendis Linda, Provence of Brandenburg. My mother was blonde; my father had black hair. All my sisters and brothers were blond. I was the only one with black hair. [laughter] So when I was born, they said, "We have one from Africa now."

Teiser: [laughter] Where did you go to school when you were very young?

Kniesche: I just went to the local school up through the eighth grade. And then either you go further, or you go to work and learn a trade.

Anyhow, after I was about twelve years old, with me it was all business already. In the summer, when the kids went in the river swimming, I opened up a stand with fruit cakes and all kinds of pastries to be sold.

Teiser: You said at twelve you started delivering rolls--

Kniesche: Yes, for the Franz Meier bakery. I had one of those wicker bags, and I carried it around and hung it over my head because it was hitting me always in the legs.

Teiser: A bag that was meant to be carried on the back of an adult?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche: I put the bag in the wagon and had the wagon and the dog, and I delivered the bread then.

Teiser: You used the baker's wagon and dog?

Kniesche: Yes. And I came home sometimes pretty late. Then when I did my homework, I made it so quick that the next morning I could not read it! [laughter] So, my school years were up to fourteen. I did reading, writing, and arithmetic. In arithmetic, I was tops. I was great in it, and geography.

But when I was fourteen and came out of school, my father wanted me to be a baker. But I wouldn't be a baker or a tailor or a shoemaker or anything like that--I wanted to be an electrician. But I couldn't reach the vise; I was so small that nobody took me [as an apprentice], which was good for me in my later years. So, my father put me in the restaurant business in a summer resort. It was a very famous place; it was Bad Kössen, where the students used to celebrate. Bismarck started it to get all the students together after Easter, and they celebrated there every year once, since Bismarck's time. It was in a big castle at the top of a hill. I learned the business there.

Teiser: Was it a resort hotel?

Kniesche: Yes, a resort hotel. The best hotel in the neighborhood.

Teiser: What was your job there?

Kniesche: I learned to be a waiter.

Teiser: Did you start out as a waiter or did you start out as a bus boy?

Kniesche: When you learned the business, you started out as a bus boy. We were--oh, about thirty bus boys and waiters then. And the cooks.

Teiser: What did you have to learn?

Kniesche: You learn everything.

Teiser: [laughter] What?

Kniesche: Waiting tables, to prepare things, to get the wine glasses that belong to the certain wines: They had their own vineyards, and in the winter we had to bottle the wine and cork it, and learn the etiquette on top of all those things. You got to learn the making of wine from one end to the other--making, bottle it and cork it, plus the labels.

Teiser: Did you have to know how to set the tables?

Kniesche: You had to know everything.

I tell you something I practiced there. I could carry only one plate of soup in one hand, and I practiced until I could carry two plates, and so forth. I made good headway. Finally, shortly afterwards, they gave me a station. I made then very good money in tips. Five marks, six marks per day. In that one year I learned more than people learn the rest of their lives. I went through the whole damn thing. I got a hell of a teaching!

Then one night I had the bowling alley, and I served some things there.

Teiser: You were serving drinks in the bowling alley?

Kniesche: Just drinks at nights. They were bowling there. I first looked around. Then I hid in the garden and went to sleep. I was tired because we worked from morning til night. There was no eight-hour shift. It was almost sometimes a sixteen-hour shift. They were looking for me all over and couldn't find me. When the chef's porter found me, he had a hose in his hand, and he hit me square over the face with that hose. I had a swelling there from one end to the other.

Kniesche: I went to the city hall police and they couldn't do nothing because the boss was the supervisor of the city. The only thing I could do, I could cut my contract, which I had for four years. You see, you work on the contract for four years without pay, only your room and board. That's all you get. You work four years for nothing. Of course, you made a little in tips here and there.

Anyhow, I broke that contract. I quit there. Then I went to sea.

Teiser: No one had robbed you or anything?

Kniesche: Well, I lost my money for the drinks.

Teiser: How did you lose it?

Kniesche: I didn't get no pay for it. I pay cash, and I collect them.

Teiser: You'd have to pay cash of your own for the drinks?

Kniesche: Yes, and collect.

Teiser: Collect from the people who got the drinks?

Kniesche: Yes. But they left. It was about one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning. They had all gone.

Teiser: So you couldn't collect.

How did a boy get enough money to put out for that sort of thing?

Kniesche: Well, I didn't need too much. Then, you always sign a note for it. They had this system down there. [Sometimes] when you went in the kitchen or the bar, you signed a note. You get one of those little checks, order blanks. You get that in the kitchen, and then you get your order out. But we collect from the diner.

Teiser: Did they tip pretty well?

Kniesche: Fairly good. They had all good customers there. The place was well known. It was a first class place.

Teiser: Was it hard to get an apprenticeship there in the first place. Did you have to be pretty good to do that?

Kniesche: Well, I don't know. They give you a chance, and if you can't make it--out you go! [laughs]

Teiser: Well, you got your whole apprenticeship in one year instead of four! [laughter]

To Sea at Fifteen

Kniesche: Then at fifteen, I started out.

[To Kniesche III]*

I went to Bremen, I was told to go and go to a hotel, the Gastler Garden. [At first] I couldn't find the place. All I could read on the paper was "Schweinsneggle and sauerkraut," and that had me more interested than everything else. I was standing right in front of the hotel. I couldn't find it! [laughs]

Kniesche III: What were you doing?

Kniesche: I was on my way to Bremerhaven.

Kniesche III: Oh, when you were going to the boat?

Kniesche: [That was] before I got to the boat. In the morning I woke up, and there was all those ships laying in the harbor. I sure had an eye full--never seen anything like that before. So I went up, ate breakfast, got dressed, and went to the harbor to take a look. I got an eye full, because I never saw anything like that in my life.

[Reading from diary, translating from German] "This morning"--that's September 14, 1903--"my brother arrived on the boat Prince Siegesmund [of the North German Lloyd line]. I went on board the ship, and we had a trial trip, and I was included. Really, it was something new to me. I thought it was the land passing instead of the ship going. That's how it looked to me. [laughter] The ship went so easy that I saw the land disappear, and I thought, "What the hell do they do with that land?" [laughs] I didn't feel that boat going.

The next day, my brother left on the same boat. He was assistant chief steward. That boat went between Australia and China.

*Italicized information excerpted from later interviews by Max Kniesche III.

Kniesche: But I went to sea then too, but I didn't go with him.

Teiser: Did he get you a job?

Kniesche: Yes. I went to New York for the first time. The boat that was generally making that trip from Bremen to New York broke the propeller shaft, so they took the Kaiseren Maria Theresa out of mothballs. So I went on that boat, and, believe me, I never had such a trip in all my life.

The goddamn thing was rolling. I was sleeping in the stern end, where the boat goes up, and every time the propellers came out, you went against the other bed. The bunks were three high.

We were more under water than above water. We were three days late coming from Bremen, which normally takes ten days but we were thirteen days crossing the Atlantic.

I was the bellhop on board the ship.

Teiser: What were your duties?

Kniesche: When the bell rang, get to the door and see what they wanted. And you know what they wanted, most of them?

Teiser: What?

Kniesche: Every time they rung the bell, they handed me one of those spittoons. I'd look at where to put my finger, and nowhere to put my finger, and I'd get sick myself continuously. [laughter] I had a devil of a time!

Believe me, first I couldn't eat anything and I was sick as a dog. Then some guy told me I should eat this salt herring.

Kniesche III: Oh, God.

Kniesche: So I had a salt herring, and the piece of herring got in the bridge of my nose. I couldn't get it out, and I didn't have enough sense to go to the doctor. Whenever I went like this, I tasted that herring. [laughter] I couldn't eat herring for years afterwards. I had a hell of a time!

Kniesche III: You went to New York and then back again?

Kniesche: Yes. That boat only made one trip. We had three hundred fifty passengers, and out of three hundred fifty passengers, three hundred were sick on board the ship! There were only damn few in the dining room.

Kniesche: Then I got on another boat--

Kniesche III: Wait a minute. Is that all in this [diary] book here? Do you have the adventures of the first trip?

Kniesche: Yes. Well, in New York, [looking at the book] there were big skyscrapers, twenty-four stories high. It was a beautiful sight. They looked to me like they all were going to fall. [laughter] You take the elevators [elevateds] going on top. And the trucks with the iron wheels over the cobblestones.

The steam train was going and the elevated [train] on Third Avenue. The cobblestones on the street, and those big trucks with the horses. They had no automobiles. Everyone would talk with their hands, because you couldn't understand anybody. They couldn't talk loud enough above the noise. [laughter]

Everyone who came from New York was talking with their hands.

The chief steward took me along to watch out for him, which way we were going. I wouldn't know a thing, you know. Then when we were on the way back to the boat on the elevated trains, the guy was drunk and I was sitting alongside of him. The captain was sitting across the aisle.

The next day, he said, "Was the captain on the elevator?" I said, "Yes." Then I got bawled out--what the hell did I do?

Well, anyhow, then we went back from New York to Bremen.

Kniesche III: What year was that?

Kniesche: 1903. We came in with music, and we went out with music. It was the only lines--North German Lloyd line, and the Hamburg-American lines--that had music on board the ship. When we came in--I tell you, that was really something nice, when you come on board ship and the music plays there. Now they pull up to the pier like they are going out to an undertaking parlor or something like that. There's no life, you know. That's what made Germany big in shipping at that time, and killed England before the First World War.

This was my first trip in New York. Then we went back to Bremen again, and I went on a different boat, Barbarossa, and then I went to Australia in 1903. We went from Germany

Kniesche: [via Southampton] to Australia. When we went from Southampton, the German boat was full with passengers to capacity going to Sydney. And the same day a B & O liner would go out from Southampton to Sydney and would go out empty, because that just was the time when the German industry came up and the English industry was taking a slump, going down. We had music on board and everything else like that; the service was good, the food was good. Anyhow, wherever you went in the Orient, when you saw that stamp, "Made in Germany," the people bought it. They know they didn't get cheated.

First we went out from Bremen, Bremerhaven, to Southampton. Then we went to Gibraltar and went in the Mediterranean, came up to Monte Carlo on the coast to Genoa. From Genoa, we went to Naples.

In Naples, we laid out there and loaded more coal in the bunkers. The city from the ocean looks very beautiful, but when you get in there, it's dirty. It really was something--they stand there on the street and do their duty right on the sidewalk! [laughter] Everybody walks behind there, and they stand there, pzzzzz, and shake your friend. [laughter]

There's an old saying--see Genoa and Naples from the distance, never go in because they are not clean. They are old cities, and they are all hanging on the hill.

Kniesche III: You couldn't land in Naples?

Kniesche: No, we were laying in the stream. That's when the coal came in down there. And when the coal came to the bunkers, the women came in with it. [laughter] Believe me, there was a hullabaloo here! It was not for me. I was too young. Too young and clean yet! [laughter]

Kniesche III: How old were you?

Kniesche: Fifteen.

Greece and the islands--Crete--and down to Port Said, through the Suez Canal. The trip through the canal is wonderful. In some of the places down there, you can jump off the ship and land on both sides.

Kniesche III: It's narrow.

Kniesche: You got pulled through with the train on the side. The train pulled the ship. Then it goes to the desert, and once in a while you have to turn in on the side and let the other ships go by.

Kniesche III: You were slower?

Kniesche: Well, to let the oncoming [ships by]--or if you carried mail, you have the privilege to go through first. It's really very, very interesting. The boats were all lit up, all going through the canal.

Then we went through the Strait of Messina and went down the Suez Canal to Port Said. When they were through the Suez Canal, came out the Suez, and then we went to the Indian Ocean, and we went on to Colombo in India [Ceylon].

You know, the boat was a coal-burner. All the boats were. There was no oil. The coal bunker, where they shoot the coal in, was right alongside the stewards' department, and they left the bull-eye open. They loaded the coal, all in little baskets. It went from one to another--the chain gang, you know--and dumped the baskets into the ship. All the dust flying around there--in the morning, we all were niggers. [laughs] From that coal, everything was black as coal. Everything was black. You couldn't wash it off. Whenever you washed yourself and touched something, it was black again. We had a hell of an experience there to get rid of that coal that was sitting all over.

Then from Colombo we went down to Australia.

Teiser: Did you have a chance to see those ports?

Kniesche: Oh yes. We went from Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, and so forth--all those ports. Then Sydney was just as small as San Francisco was in 1906; they were both undeveloped.

Teiser: What was your job by then? Were you still a bell hop?

Kniesche: No, then I was a steward.

Teiser: I see. What did a steward do on those ships?

Kniesche: We served the people in the dining room breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Kniesche III: How long does it take to get through the Suez Canal?

Kniesche: Almost a day. We came to Suez on the twenty-third of November. We got out, and went to Aden. There we couldn't get on shore either--we lay on the outside.

Kniesche III: You stopped for coal again?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: How often did you have to stop for coal in those days?

Kniesche: Very often. You can imagine what they have to fire there. They have to shovel it in there continuously, and the ship can only carry so much.

[referring to diary] The day we arrived in Suez, they brought provisions on board and then travelled further. Right now, we're on the Red Sea, and it is very hot.

Kniesche III: You were travelling in November?

Kniesche: Yes. "This morning, we passed the lighthouse on the twelve islands. They call them the Twelve Apostles, the islands." On the twenty-sixth, we arrived in Aden, but we were laying offshore. "Right now, we are in the open sea again, after we get out of Suez. December 31, we arrived in Colombo, India. Here we were offshore again, and we took all the coal we can use, because just from Colombo to Australia is fourteen days.

Everything is closed up in the heat. I tell you something, we layed up on the deck and went to sleep. When we woke up, we were all black. Everything was black. There you get the--what do you call it? You get some kind of disease in the morning, when all your bones are stiff.

Kniesche III: Like rheumatism?

Kniesche: Just like rheumatism. Just like rheumatism.

Kniesche III: Were you carrying passengers then, too?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. Lots of passengers.

Kniesche III: What were they doing? They were sleeping on top too?

Kniesche: They slept wherever they could to get a little fresh air.

Kniesche III: That must have been a dirty boat, with all that coal.

Kniesche: Yes, it had to be washed all the time. Everything had to be washed. I had to clean the toilet, and the toilet was alongside of the coal bunker, and that stuffed up all the

Kniesche: time. We didn't have no pump, or things like that. You had to go down there, among the submarine and things like that [laughs] and get that thing cleaned.

Kniesche III: Oh, my God. [laughs]

Kniesche: I tell you something--and no gloves on, either! You squeeze the banana. In Colombo, the kanaka's, if you throw money overboard, they go after it. They catch it, before it gets far down. They come right by the boat and dive for money.

Kniesche III: Where was this?

Kniesche: In Colombo. We called them the kanaka's.

[reading] "December 2, we left Colombo, and now it starts the long trip, for fourteen days from here to Australia." On the seventeenth, we arrived in Freemantle, on the land. There's nothing there now. It was just a small city on the point. On the twentieth, we arrived in Adelaide.

Kniesche III: That's in Australia, right?

Kniesche: It's down around the coast--from Freemantle to Adelaide. That bay was like going into a bay like the San Francisco Bay, through the Golden Gate. Lots of sharks there.

Kniesche III: The water's warm?

Kniesche: Yes. We caught some sharks there on a meat hook, and pulled them up. On the twenty-fifth, we arrived for Christmas in Melbourne. We celebrated Christmas in Melbourne. While we came into the bay at Melbourne, the steamer Bremen came out. It's beautiful. When you are on the ocean, you meet the boats, you know, close by.

On the twenty-ninth, we arrived in Sydney. When you go into the harbor, the city is all the way built around, just like San Francisco, built around the bay. My brother was married there to an Australian girl. Imagine the comic! His wife couldn't speak German, I couldn't speak English! [laughter] We all sat there like a bunch of idiots.

Kniesche III: Did you meet your brother there?

Kniesche: No.

Kniesche III: Just his family?

Kniesche: Just the family. I had a hell of a time! That's where sign-reading comes handy. I had two days off in Sydney, and I wanted to see the city. So I went out of town on the streetcar, but one street went up and the other went down, I didn't know, and I got lost. I couldn't see the boats, so I climbed up the high hill and looked around where the harbor was. Then I went by my own compass--walked. I just walked all the time, because I couldn't ask anybody where I wanted to go and so forth. [laughs] I think I walked four hours!

Kniesche III: Did you find it?

Kniesche: Yes, I found the harbor all right.

Kniesche III: This is what year?

Kniesche: 1904.

They all drive to the left, and here they go right. If you ever get mixed up, then you really get mixed up!

I'm starting with the home trip. [reading in his diary] Now we pass the harbor. They are passing all of the harbors, which we came in the other way.

Kniesche III: You returned exactly the same way you came?

Kniesche: The same way we came.

Kniesche III: You had passengers going back, too? The same passengers, or you brought back different passengers?

Kniesche: No, we had different passengers. The twenty-sixth, in the Gulf of Biscayne, with the rough weather, when there was a freighter laying with signal flags flying for help--his freight shifted. It was laying on the side. He wanted us to stay with him. He had an accident in the harbor. But we had no time to lose because we were carrying the mail. Another steamer came by.

Kniesche III: Oh, you were the mail carrier?

Kniesche: Yes. We took the mail down there.

Kniesche III: Top priority.

Kniesche: We were at that time a fast ship. We came back the same way to Bremenhaven. It took us about three months, the trip to Australia and back.

More Voyages and Adventures

Kniesche: So I hired on another trip, with the same boat. We went from Bremenhaven to New York again.

Believe me, you can't save no money on board the ship, because the money you make, you spend while you go from one town to another. [laughter] You leave broke and come home broke. You come back, and you make some more debts, and you can't pay them.

After I stayed in New York, I sent some money to pay my debts to a fellow in Bremenhaven.

Kniesche III: --that you owed money to?

Kniesche: That I owed to. I sent it from here yet.

Kniesche III: Oh? That was honest.

Kniesche: I made five trips with the Barbarrosa from New York to Bremenhaven.

Kniesche III: You did? You made five trips across the Atlantic--the same trip?

Kniesche: The same trip, from Bremenhaven to New York.

I kept going until 1904. In 1904, I went to China, when the war was between Russia and Japan. Then I saw that old boat again that I made my first trip on, the Kaiseren Maria Theresa. It was a balloon ship for the Russians. Met it in the Suez Canal. We had to wait outside and let the Ost Sea Fleet, the Russian Ost Sea Fleet go through there to go to the Orient.

Then you kept on in the Suez Canal. Then you went to Singapore. Then you came to the inland seas from Japan--Nagasaki, Kobe, Yokohama--and see Fujiyama way up in the distance, and with the cherry trees blooming, you never saw such a view in all your life!

Teiser: Were you in any danger during the Russo-Japanese war?

Kniesche: No, we didn't get too close. We got as far as Tsing-Tao that was opposite Port Arthur.

Kniesche: We went through the Suez Canal, and we came in Suez in just a few hours, and then we went to Aden.

Kniesche III: This was when?

Kniesche: 1904. [referring to diary] Today we come out of Colombo. Now for me this is a new trip that's coming now from Colombo. From Colombo, instead of going to Australia, we're going up north to Singapore.

Kniesche III: You were becoming pretty experienced by then, weren't you, on the boats?

Kniesche: Yes.

Today we arrived in Penang--

Kniesche III: What's the date? The fourth of November?

Kniesche: Yes. We had Prince Adelberg on board. The entrance in Singapore is very beautiful, small streets.

Kniesche III: Surrounded with mountains?

Kniesche: Ringed with mountains, and just enough of an opening there to let the ships go through. [reading] "Today on the twentieth we left Singapore." The twenty-fourth of November we arrived in Hong Kong. It's the same condition there as in Singapore. You get in on one end, and come out on the other. The Bismarck was laying there. A German boat. We left Hong Kong on the twenty-ninth of November. Stayed there two days on the river.

Kniesche III: You didn't see too much.

Kniesche: On December first, "Leaving this morning for Japan." On the fifth of December, we came into Nagasaki. You go where you can buy all the porcelain there.

You take from Nagasaki to Kobe the Inland Sea. It's beautiful. All the islands in there you pass by, and [Mount] Fujiyama in the distance, white--a beautiful thing, and the cherry blossom trees blooming. It's wonderful down there, the Inland Sea. The boat goes there, and you think, "Now it's going to hit the rock!" and then it turns off.

Christmas was hot. We had summer there.

Kniesche III: Where were you?

Kniesche: In Kobe and Yokohama. We went up as far as Yokohama.

Kniesche III: In Yokohama, you stayed two weeks?

Kniesche: Yes. I saw a lot of things there, you know. We arrived in Yokohama on December the twelfth. We stayed there two weeks. We had a wonderful time and saw everything. It's really interesting, you see.

Kniesche III: Did you have any experiences in Yokohama?

Kniesche: Not exactly. We were tourists. [reading] "Today is Christmas, and I haven't celebrated for a long time Christmas."

Kniesche III: You were in Yokohama for two weeks. Now you're going back?

Kniesche: Going back, the same trip as when we came, from city to city. So we skip that. On the twenty-seventh, January the twenty-seventh--

Kniesche III: That's your birthday.

Kniesche: This is my birthday, and we were here in Antwerp.

Kniesche III: You were seventeen then.

Kniesche: We went to Bremerhaven, and arrived there on the second of February.

Kniesche III: Did you do anything on your birthday there or not?

Kniesche: No, nothing. I got off the ship and went on a different ship. On February the tenth, I travelled, went off on the steamer Prince Eitel Fredrick. I had a good friend of mine that I was with in the restaurant down there where I learned the business at Bad Küsssen. His name was Bill Eckert.

Kniesche III: That was in that hotel?

Kniesche: Yes. He was on board the ship also at this time.

Kniesche III: Where were you going to?

Kniwaxhw: Back to China.

Kniesche III: Oh, you were going right back again.

Kniesche: Going right back to China--a brand-new boat.

Kniesche III: What was the date on that?

Kniesche: February 10, 1905.

Kniesche III: You really weren't even home for very long.

Kniesche: No.

The war was [still on] between Russia and Japan. On February 11, we arrived in Antwerp. From Antwerp, we left the same night, and we had a wonderful time in the city. We got loaded--and everything. [laughing] We did lots of things that you can't repeat--

Kniesche III: --On tape. [laughs] Do you have it all written there?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Why don't you tell me, and we'll turn this thing off here.

Kniesche: That's all right. We arrived in Southampton and on the same day we went out again, and then we went to Gibraltar and Genoa and Monte Carlo, Naples. We always liked to see it again. It's beautiful.

We took on board the ship Prince Leopold from Prussia. He was going to China. A battleship was laying in the harbor then. They shot a salute.

Kniesche III: To you?

Kniesche: [laughs] No, not to me, but to the prince, who we had on board the ship.

Kniesche III: This was where? What city?

Kniesche: In Naples. I said, "If we had more like that, like the prince, we might as well close up, just pull down the curtain." [laughs]

Kniesche III: What do you mean by that?

Kniesche: Well, I don't know. I guess he didn't interest me, to a certain extent. Right now, we are going back to Port Said, and going through the Suez Canal. Then we arrived in Suez and went right back to Aden, and then always loading coal, you know, because you only can carry so much.

Kniesche III: No what were your jobs on this? You were the steward, right?

Kniesche: Right.

Kniesche III: You were now the ship's steward?

Kniesche: I was ship steward.

Kniesche III: You were no longer the assistant?

Kniesche: No.

It was getting so hot again that you don't know where to sleep. From Suez, we went to India and Colombo again, and stayed only a couple hours.

Kniesche III: You arrived where?

Kniesche: In Benang. Just a couple of hours, and then travelled to Singapore.

Kniesche III: When did you ever go to Tsing-tao?

Kniesche: Coming now. We stayed one day in Singapore and then went to Hong Kong. An American cruise ship fired a salute when we came in there. Then we left. Then we arrived in Shanghai, and laid in the stream.

Kniesche III: Then Singapore?

Kniesche: Yes. We were going up to Tsing-tao--to Shanghai, Japan, and then Tsing-tao. That's where we dumped the prince off, in Tsing-tao.

Kniesche III: What was Tsing-tao like, the city?

Kniesche: Like San Francisco. You come into a harbor, and you get in the back of the city, and then the mountains on top, and they had all of the fortifications in there. That's one thing the Japs never took during the war, Tsing-tao.

[referring to diary.] Russian battleship and six torpedo boats. When the Russian fleet came from Singapore, they came by the island of Formosa. When the fleet came by there, the Japanese were laying behind Formosa, and they destroyed the whole doggone fleet.

Kniesche III: That was the fleet that you saw in Tsing-tao?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche: I tell you something--it was funny--when we came into Tsing-tao, all the Chinamen were talking German.

[Then] to Yokohama. We stayed there ten days, in Yokohama.

Kniesche III: That was always the last place you went to, Yokohama?

Kniesche: Yes. Yokohama's a beautiful city. A great many tourists, went there and go in the houses. [laughs] Very interesting. They bring a little pot with coals for heat. You sit on the fire, and things like that. They really had it down pat.

Kniesche III: This was with your friend Billy Eckert, too?

Kniesche: Yes. The trip back was the same as the others when we came, so we skip that whole thing.

Kniesche III: Okay.

Kniesche: We get off on board the ship, and I went back to work in the place where I learned, one season.

Kniesche III: In the hotel at Bad Kössen? You went back?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Was that guy still there? That guy that hit you?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. And the headwaiter, and--you know, the headwaiter was a roustabout. He says, "It's just like before," because he used to knock the stuffing out of us kids. My friend says, "This time, it's different," you know. [laughs] He was older than I am. We stayed there just for the summer. One summer.

Kniesche III: This was what year?

Kniesche: In--let me look here. 1905. July. Then in 1906, we came back home to see my family.

Kniesche III: That was the first time you'd been home, in all those years?

Kniesche: Yes--and stayed there for a little while. Then we went back, where I learned the business down there [Bad Kössen]. My friend and I wanted to drink a bottle of champagne, and they refused to serve us. In plain English, they kicked us out. [laughter] That was crust to do in Germany at that time, to go in there where you work just to eat there. The hell! You didn't belong there! So we got kicked out, all right.

Kniesche III: You were still with that same guy--what was his name?

Kniesche: Eckert.

[referring to diary] Today we took a trip to Berlin--Eckert came from Berlin--we stayed there for a little while. It was very interesting to see before the war, because it was really some place! We went to a guy who can give you work when you ask for work, and you can get work there. You know, those agencies there. We went in there, and I guess we got a little fresh there, you know. He says, you know, "Right now, after the holidays, we feed the pigs with waiters!" [laughter] He didn't need anybody. [laughs] I went to Bremendhaven, and my friend stayed in Berlin.

Kniesche III: So you never went back home again, after going to Berlin?

Kniesche: No. Then I went to Hamburg, and when I went to Hamburg, I had patent-leather shoes on. One Sunday I walked through Hamburg in my stocking feet, with my shoes in my hand, because I couldn't walk any more--they were pinching me. You know, on the top of my toes. I was in misery, believe me. [laughs] And it was hot!

Well, I came back to Bremen, and then I signed on on a new ship again--Koenigen Louisa.

Kniesche III: When was that?

Kniesche: 1906, January the seventh. We went to New York. That ship was going from New York to Italy, back and forth, between the Mediterranean and New York. I made quite a few trips out there.

Then I got off the boat and I tell you, there's an episode that happened that made me stay in America. There was an episode. On that last trip going to Genoa, we didn't have many passengers, and we were washing the gangways. I was up on the ladder with a bucket of water and was washing the walls and ceiling when my chief steward came underneath my ladder, and my bucket slipped and fell right over that guy's head. He got all soaking wet!

Well, then I said to myself, "There's no use looking for another ship. With what they put in my seaman's book, I wouldn't get no ship. Well," I thought, "if I had to starve in Germany, I might as well starve here." So that made me stay in America.

- Kniesche: I went to the Immigration Bureau in Bowling Green in New York at the border and came on shore past the immigration.
- Teiser: You didn't jump ship, then? [laughing]
- Kniesche: No sirree! I did everything legal.
- Teiser: They let you quit?
- Kniesche: They let me quit. I went and made the application for it, which was the right thing to do.

An Immigrant in New York

Kniesche III: Did you have a hard time entering, or they were taking immigrants then?

Kniesche: Oh, they took any immigrants. I stayed in America. Here's where my new life began again, in a strange country, you know. I'm sitting in Hoboken on my little wicker basket. I didn't know anybody. I have no friends, nobody in this country. I can't speak English. I sit there, and watch where the wind was going. I said, "Wherever the wind is going, that's where I go, because I have no other place. I'm going with the wind."

So there was my whole thing. I did everything on the spur of the moment. This was on the thirteenth. On the fourteenth--

Kniesche III: --of October, 1905--

Kniesche: --the ship left New York for Genoa again, but I stayed here. I was at the age of eighteen, and I hadn't found any work yet. I'm all alone, absolutely lost, lost. Everything is strange to me. My money is down to three dollars. I get up at three o'clock getting the newspaper, the German newspaper, and I was looking for work. I went to a--what they call a abschneider. The guy would take anything. If you have something, they take everything away--you got what you have left. There were plenty of them like that.

Kniesche III: Like a loanshark?

Kniesche: A loanshark, yes. I went by one of those guys to look for work, and I got a job as an omnibus, a bus boy.

Kniesche III: You mean you were getting paid twenty dollars a month?

Kniesche: Twenty dollars a month. I had to pay that guy two dollars.

Kniesche III: A month?

Kniesche: No, for the place that I got the job. I had to pay him two dollars.

I worked in Childs Restaurant. I got five dollars a week.

Teiser: You were a waiter again, were you?

Kniesche: Yes. Then I had a furnished room which was \$1.75 a week; that left me \$3.25 to live on.

Teiser: Did Childs give you your meals?

Kniesche: You get the meals, yes.

Teiser: Were they good meals at Childs then?

Kniesche: Oh yes, it was pretty good. It was pretty cheap--they were all cheap.

Kniesche III: Now how long had you been in New York, by the time you got a job? You arrived when? On the thirteenth?

Kniesche: Well, on the thirteenth of October.

Kniesche III: And that was the twentieth of October?

Kniesche: That was the twentieth of October. That wasn't so bad. I'm absolutely broke!

The hotel where I'm working [next] for is the Hotel Belvedere. Then the people where I live, they are all very nice, but everybody speaks German and they don't speak English. The waiters and everybody speaks German. I'm a bellboy in the same hotel--a bellhop.

Kniesche III: Oh, you were a bellhop then.

Kniesche: A bellhop. I go up there, and I never forget it in all my life. It was five stories high, and you had to walk it--no elevators. The guy ordered drip absinthe.

Kniesche III: What?

Kniesche:

Drip absinthe. By the time I reached the first floor I had it all twisted. I went up there three times. The third time, the guy turned me around, gave me a kick in the rear, and down I went the stairs! [laughter] That was my experience. Well, I didn't last very long at that damn place anyhow.

As a bellhop I only got twelve dollars a month instead of twenty dollars, because there wasn't tips. But I got a tip in the rear end. [laughter] But I'm learning pretty good English here.

[referring to diary] Christmas, it's snowing and the same time it's warm, and it's Christmas Day. I sit in my room, all by myself, absolutely down, and just dreaming for better times. All those happy times. In my mind, I let all the years go by, and all the things what happened, what I went through. I got to pull myself together and get out of the dumps and get back to normal. Don't let your head hang. I made my bed, and I have to lie in it. I'm going to go it, because I'm on my way to San Francisco.

January the first, 1906. I quit my job, and--

Kniesche III: As a bellhop?

Kniesche:

As a bellhop in New York. Last night, we had three inches of snow falling. It sure was a mess. I'm absolutely down and out. I only can eat once a day, otherwise the money doesn't last. I can't do any more, because I don't know how long I'm going to be out of work. My rent is due for two weeks already, and I owed them.

Finally, I got a job in a restaurant for lunchtime, as a busboy, and at night, I helped behind the bar. I got six dollars a week, and I got no extra money. That means you worked seven days for six bucks. [laughs] On January the twenty-seventh my finances lifted themselves, and I saved a little money. Today is my eighteenth birthday, and I felt very much disappointed that my sisters and brothers did not write me. Nobody wrote me. I was the verlassen guy already.

Kniesche III: You were forgotten.

Kniesche:

I was forgotten. I left when I was fifteen, and now I am eighteen. My job, it was too much dirty work to get done. I couldn't see my way clear to get anywhere ahead, so I quit. But it started again--money got low, no work, looking for something, anything. Then I got into a restaurant by Wheel

Kniesche: and Whitman on Beaver Street. That was downtown, off Broadway. I liked it there very much. They are closed Sundays, so Sundays I worked extra.

For seven months, I didn't write anything in the book. I was working in Wheel and Whitman's, and I made pretty good money.

Kniesche III: So you were still working there seven months later?

Kniesche: Yes. I left them, and now I'm two months without work again.

Kniesche III: When was this? What's the month?

Kniesche: November 1906. And the money's all gone! [laughs]

Kniesche III: Why did you quit?

Kniesche: I don't know. [laughs] A change of scenery, maybe? I had my teeth fixed. It cost me forty dollars. Now the misery begins. The one good thing is, I still have my humor.

Kniesche III: You wrote that in there?

Kniesche: Well, yes. It's a good thing that I don't have any more of the misery, but I still have my humor. I didn't lose that. Then I always have the hopes that some day a better time will come. Here I gotta fight like anything. The trouble is, I'm too young, and they want people between twenty and thirty. I'm small, but willing and full of pep. I made up my mind that I want to go from city to city to San Francisco. The rent I owed three weeks. That's November, 1906.

Kniesche III: 1906? Where were you then?

Kniesche: I was in New York. It was hot like in the summer then. I got a job as waiter, and I like it very much.

Kniesche III: Where?

Kniesche: The Office Restaurant, the Office on Third Avenue. I'm making pretty good money there. I'm right now in good finances. On the twenty-seventh, on my birthday, I celebrated in the opera. They played Siegfried. It was wonderful.

Kniesche III: You went by yourself?

Kniesche: I guess so. This day, there was an awful blizzard.

Kniesche III: Did you always enjoy the opera?

Kniesche: Yes.

We had a blizzard, and I never seen anything like it. In one night we had three feet of snow. Everything stands still.

Yes. Well, in the summer before, in New York. I worked in Long Island. I haven't got it in here. I worked in Long Island, in the hotel. Loehmann's Hotel, at Avon-by-the-Sea.

Kniesche III: That's part of the three months that you're missing in the book?

Kniesche: Yes. At Loehmann's Hotel. I had to do everything. He didn't want to take me at first, so I told him, I says, "You try me out. You can fire me tomorrow." He said, "Go to work, my boy." So I went to work. I worked there all summer. It was nice. I was there like his son in the house. But then I got too familiar. They wanted me to marry one of their daughters but I was on my way to San Francisco. So I left.

Teiser: You didn't know English much; how did you know what people were ordering?

Kniesche: Well, being on the ship a little while, and things like that, I get some of the drift. You see, at that time in New York, there was German, Irish, French, and Italians. There were people in New York who never learned English; they were always in a bunch together--the Germans were living there, that one was living there--they all landed in certain spots. Just like in San Francisco years ago.

Teiser: Had you been able to save any money when you decided to stay in New York?

Kniesche: Very little. When you came to a harbor, you would spend it. You had some time off; you'd get off the ship and you spent your money. You never came back with money.

Teiser: What did you think of New York?

Kniesche: It wasn't as big as it is today. There wasn't those high-rise buildings there; there were some, but they were about twelve, fourteen stories, not the way they are now.

Teiser: Was it a good city for a young man to be in?

Kniesche: Well, it was a cosmopolitan town; it was a mixture of everything.

Teiser: Did you find other German people?

Kniesche: There were lots of them there. Lots of German restaurants. So I worked in New York. I worked in hotels in different places. I worked in Luchow's on [East] 14th Street. It was one of the old German restaurants there. I worked another couple of places, different places, afterwards.

Then I left there and went from city to city till I arrived to San Francisco. It took me a long time, though. When I was about thirteen, fourteen years old, I used to read about Buffalo Bill, Barbary Coast, Kearny Street and all this junk, and I made up my mind, "I'm going to San Francisco" at that time already.

Working Across the Continent

Kniesche: I went to Albany up north and I worked at night there. I worked about three, four weeks, something like that. Then I went to Cleveland, Ohio, and worked in the Hollanden.

Teiser: Were these mostly German restaurants that you worked in?

Kniesche: Well, no, they were then American restaurants. They were American restaurants, but they had all kinds of foreign help because that's all they had--that's all that came to this country. At that time, every ship came in with capacity full of immigrants. They came by the thousands.

Teiser: Did you have trouble getting jobs?

Kniesche: Sometimes yes. But the funny part of this, all the people who came from Europe, they knew a trade. From 1900 to 1930, this country just mushroomed from the influx of immigrants that went to work right away; the workers spent money, others spent money, and business was booming up to 1930. Then they stopped immigration from Europe and came from the other side. The ones we get from the other side, we are still paying them off; they are not working yet, they are just simply living from the fat of the land. You see? That's the difference today.

Teiser: By the time you came, you were an expert waiter.

Kniesche: Yes, by the time I was. I had good jobs. I was young and small. Every time I applied for a job, when they'd say this, I'd say, "Why don't you try me out? You can fire me tomorrow." I'd never get fired; I'd never get fired till I quit myself and left the place, like [in] Cleveland. He said, "Why don't you stay here?" I said, "No, I'm on my way to San Francisco." So I left.

[referring to diary] When I arrived in Cleveland, it was snowing and raining.

Kniesche III: What was the date?

Kniesche: That was April, the tenth, 1907. [goes through book] I'm looking here for fourteen days' work. The day I started to work in the Hollanden, the biggest hotel in Cleveland. [laughs] That was April the twelfth. On the twenty-fourth I quit my job again.

Kniesche III: Did you ever get fired? You just quit all the time?

Kniesche: I quit all the time. I got trouble with the headwaiter. I couldn't get along with him. I started to work in the Bismarck Cafe.

Kniesche III: In Cleveland?

Kniesche: In Cleveland. That was a regular sporting house! [reading] I overslept this morning, and I got fired! Just like that--nothing to it. [laughter] So on the seventeenth, I bought myself a ticket to Denver.

Kniesche III: So you didn't stay in Cleveland very long?

Kniesche: No, not too long. About a couple of months. Through Chicago to Denver. I went to Denver. Now here in Denver, I never gambled before. In Denver, some guy came to me and says, "Gimme fifty cents. I want to make a combination." He makes a combination on horses, and comes back with eight dollars for me for the fifty cents. I said, "How long has this been going on? Jesus!" That was my start of playing the horses. Then I became a fiend. [laughs]

Chicago now here. I came in on May the nineteenth.

Kniesche III: You didn't work in Chicago, you just passed through?

Kniesche: No. I didn't like it. I came on in Denver. I'm half dead from the long trip from Chicago to Denver, in the chair car. You sit down there, you know. Everything, scenery is beautiful, but my money's getting less again. All I have left is five dollars. I have my shoes fixed and my laundry washed, and you got to have the rent for the room and so on.

Kniesche III: Where were you staying? You didn't write that down.

Kniesche: Oh, I don't know. A furnished room, wherever I could put my hat in. It wasn't fancy, you know. [laughs] There was nothing there. On May the twenty-first, I started working at the Savoy Hotel. I don't like it at all! That was on the twenty-first. On the twenty-third, I quit again. [Kniesche III laughs] I'm hoping to get a job again.

I have a friend coming here [from New York]. His name was Henry Goertz. His brother lives here. He has a cigar factory.

Kniesche III: Where? In Denver?

Kniesche: No, here in San Francisco. He was going to come to Denver there and bring me twenty-five dollars with him.

Kniesche III: In Denver?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: He was going to come and bring you some money?

Kniesche: Well, my money is all gone. I hocked my watch and everything I had. I got four dollars and fifty cents for it. [laughs]

Kniesche III: You did?

Kniesche: Yes, for the watch. I haven't eaten anything yet, and I have no money and nowhere to go to get it. I have my overcoat, and it cost me fifteen dollars, but they don't want no clothing. I went through all the pockets to see what I could find.

Kniesche III: There was nothing to find?

Kniesche: Except ten cents in the pants. I left everything there is, and got me something to eat, for ten cents. You get a good meal of stew for ten cents. I was hungry! If my friend doesn't come tonight, then I'm absolutely finished. The landlord, he wants his rent, and all I have is one cent. I still had a penny yet. [laughs] My humor still keeps me above water. On the twenty-eighth--

Kniesche III: --of May--

Kniesche: --1907, my friend doesn't come, and I'm absolutely finished. [reading] Today I haven't eaten anything yet, and I don't know where to go.

Kniesche III: This is the twenty-eighth.

Kniesche: The twenty-eighth. [laughs] I think, "If I don't eat pretty soon, I'm going to kick the bucket!" [laughter] And I don't give a damn. Once you have to go anyhow. So I don't care no more.

Kniesche III: Is that what you said there?

Kniesche: Yes.

[Then] one night I slept in the park; the landlord kicked me out.

Kniesche III: You slept in the park?

Kniesche: Yes, in the park in front of the hotel.

Kniesche III: So then you got a job in the Brown Palace?

Kniesche: In the Brown Palace, yes. On the twenty-ninth, I worked on a banquet in the evening at five o'clock, in Brown Palace Hotel. They had a banquet down there. The first thing, when I saw the rolls there, I fell over and I sure filled up my stomach, because that damn thing was working like hell. But it was high time that I get something in there.

Kniesche III: That was the twenty-ninth that you finally got to eat?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Did you work there at the Brown Palace for a while?

Kniesche: I worked there for a while, yes. I quit there on the fourth of July. I had an argument with the headwaiter, and I had to quit the job. In other words, I got fired. For good measure, I socked him one in the eye. [laughter] Then I had to quit.

Kniesche III: You hit the guy in the Brown Palace?

Kniesche: They had me arrested, and I had to pay ten dollars' fine. I just telegraphed to my friend in New York to send me fifteen dollars by wire. That money I received immediately.

Kniesche: And it's still good if you have good friends here and there. Henry Goertz was the man, I know that yet. Then I went to Colorado Springs with the money, and asked for work. But there's nothing doing there yet. The season is not before July.

That was June the fifth. Today I started to work in the Albany Hotel.

Kniesche III: Where? In Colorado Springs?

Kniesche: Yes. Worked until I could get into the Antlers. I'm in the best of spirits now, because I can jingle a little money in my pockets. [chuckles] The Antlers Hotel.

Kniesche: June the ninth. I tell you, it's beautiful around the Antlers.

At that time that was the best place, that was. I was the room waiter there.

One day we went to Colorado City horseback riding. I never was much on a horse. While I was sitting there--you sit three hours on the horse steady--when I got off the horse, I fell right on my rear end. I couldn't stand on my legs. [laughter] I had to climb the stairs in the hotel, and I couldn't make it. So they put me in the dining room, away from the room job, which I was tickled pink about. I waited there till the season was over, and then I went looking for a job in Glenwood Springs. But I couldn't get nothing. They had nothing but women working there. I blew twenty-five dollars going to Glenwood Springs.

Then I went back to Denver and worked a while in the--I know the man's name, but I forgot the place now; I can't remember the place now. There the cowboys would come in the main street. They would hitch their horses on the posts in the main street, and then they went in the saloon--it was a frontier town.

[referring to diary] I got a job in the Albany Hotel. The twenty-first of August I started. [Then] I quit again! I'm on my way to Los Angeles.

From Denver on, the money--back East it was a quarter; back West, it was two bits. There was one bit and two bits. It was this way because in San Francisco we had only gold and silver and no paper money and no pennies. So either a drink was fifteen cents, or you had two for a quarter. One bit or two bits. A bit was fifteen cents and two bits was twenty-five cents.

Teiser: I see. In all of these travels, how did you travel? Did you go on trains, stagecoaches, or what?

Kniesche: I went on trains, stagecoaches. You'd sit there sometimes for three days on a train without a bed. By god, you was all beat up then.

Teiser: How'd you eat?

Kniesche: At that time, the Santa Fe system, they had Harvey Houses. The train stopped there for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Teiser: Did you get good meals at those places?

Kniesche: It just depends what you could afford.

Teiser: Could you get enough if you didn't have a lot of money?

Kniesche: Yes. Things were cheap then. Things were very cheap.

Kniesche III: You took the train to Los Angeles?

Kniesche: I took the train, and I bought a second-hand ticket that time. You bought a round-trip ticket and sold it [the return] on the other end, and you picked it up. The conductor, he knows that it was wrong. He asked me where I bought it. I couldn't answer him, "So-and-so and so-and-so." I couldn't answer him. If I had a little guts at that time, I would have given him five dollars, and he would have left me alone.

But I couldn't bribe anybody at that time. I still had a little pride in me. So anyhow, I was in that whole coach--a woman and a child and me. That guy pestered the life out of me. He says, "Got anything to identify yourself?" I said, "I have nothing." So when I signed that name, I could write that name exactly the way it was on the ticket. I can do that today yet because that stayed with me.

I tell you something--I'll have to write it for you. [writes] Ditman. That's the way it was on the ticket--"E. Ditman." I never forget that name, [laughs] because I tell you something--when we came into a station, I jumped off, and when the train started moving, I jumped on again. I had a wonderful trip!! [laughter] It took so long, and then we lay there sometimes, and they wanted to take me to the baggage room where my trunk was. Then I would have been sunk altogether. They would have kicked me off at Albuquerque. On the twenty-fifth of August we arrived in Los Angeles. It cost me thirty-five dollars for that trip.

Kniesche: I went to Los Angeles and I worked there in the Palace [restaurant] for Mrs. Gonker, I think was her name. I worked there a while.

Teiser: Where was that in Los Angeles?

Kniesche: On Spring Street--First and Spring.

Teiser: What kind of a place was it?

Kniesche: Just a medium-class place. Los Angeles wasn't a big town then. It was a small little town in a sandy country.

Teiser: Was it quite different from the cities where you'd been?

Kniesche: Well, yes, the people were different. In the East, they were more European, whereas in the West they were absolutely western; they didn't believe in tipping or anything. They were different altogether.

Teiser: How about the food--was it different too?

Kniesche: No, they had all the German cooks, French cooks, Italian cooks. Especially in San Francisco.

Teiser: In Los Angeles, did they have more fresh food than they had in the East, or was there not any real difference?

Kniesche: About the same; there was no difference.

I was there when they built the Westlake highway there, through Westlake Park, with convict labor--ball and chain. There was the fellow who used to pull the teeth, Painless Parker. He used for the first time Novocain. [laughter] Painless Parker would have a horse and a wagon, and he would have the people sitting in the chair and would pull the teeth out painlessly, because he put the Novocain in there at that time. Painless Parker--that's where he got his start.

Teiser: So you could stand there and watch him?

Kniesche: Yes, and all the people out around there.

Teiser: When you started across the country, working your way from restaurant to restaurant--I'm thinking about the union situation--

Kniesche: Oh, there wasn't a union.

Teiser: There were no unions across the country like that?

Kniesche: There was no union.

Teiser: And none in Los Angeles when you got there?

Kniesche: No. Los Angeles was wide open. There were no unions.

Finally San Francisco

Kniesche: Then, I came on up to San Francisco with the ship. I said to myself, "Well, I'm going to go second class in the lumber schooner." Second class--I thought that was good. It was the George W. Elder. I arrived in San Francisco, one and a half years after the fire and earthquake.*

Teiser: What was your first impression of the city, as you came in from the sea?

Kniesche: Well, I want to tell you something. I didn't see much. I was down below. On a lumber schooner, I couldn't sit on top. [laughs] I was down below. I was down in the bilge.

Teiser: [laughter] In the bilge!

Kniesche: Yes. The boats were coming up there, and you know, going up north it's always rough; going south it's beautiful. That little short boat was rocking like anything, and I got seasick again, after being aboard a ship for three years! Can you imagine that?! [laughter]

When I came to San Francisco, I was on my own. I didn't know anybody here, but you get bunched with young people together, things like that, then start gambling. I played the horses.

Teiser: Where did you play the horses here?

Kniesche: There was a race [track] in Emeryville. There was one in Ingleside [San Francisco] that you can see yet the trace of the track--the way they built the houses around the race track there. Then there was one down on the Peninsula. Gambling was wide open.

*See footnote, page 33 for estimated date of arrival.

Kniesche: One time, in the place I worked in San Francisco, in the Heidelberg on Turk Street between Franklin and Van Ness, I played the horses then too. At one time I got a tip from Barney Schreiber. He had a stable, and I got a tip there. He came to me and said, "When you go to the track tomorrow, bet on Deutschland." So I come on the track: five hundred to one! I said, "I'm not going to bet on anything like that." And believe me, the horse won five hundred to one, and they paid five hundred to one. I kicked myself going on the ferry boat across the Bay till I was black and blue. [laughter]

Teiser: [laughter] That was in the East Bay?

Kniesche: That was over in Emeryville. Anyhow, I gambled.

Teiser: Did you put bets with bookies too in the city?

Kniesche: Yes, that too--everything. I gambled.

So in 1915, the [Panama Pacific International] Exposition here on Van Ness Avenue--down below when you look down here [referring to view from window] the water came up to Lombard Street. Then they filled it in and built the Exposition on there in 1915. It is now called the Marina District. On the last day of the races--

Teiser: They had races at the fair? And you could gamble there?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Did you win?

Kniesche: Sometimes I'd win something, and sometimes I lost. Anyhow, the last day of the Exposition and the racetrack, I bet on the horse, Jack Atkin. I never forget that. Tom Knowland was riding, and knew the trouble too. I said, "You ought to win with this horse." He says, "No, I'm holding it back." Well, the horse won all by himself.

Then I said to myself, from that day, never will I bet another horse and gamble! I haven't done either yet. I absolutely stay away from the whole doggone thing.*

*See also p. 47.

- Teiser: What did San Francisco look like when you first saw it?
- Kniesche: They were still sleeping in the park opposite the Fairmont Hotel. And on Fillmore Street, on Fillmore and Eddy, where the park is up there. The whole thing, from the Ferry Building up Market Street to Van Ness Avenue, and the Fisherman's Wharf, was burned out. There was only three buildings standing here [near the Kniesche home on the west side of Russian Hill], and I bought one from a Dr. [F.L.C.] Marquis. They had tarpaper on the outside, and that stood the fire.
- Teiser: For heaven's sake!
- Kniesche: Yes, that was one of the three buildings up here that stood the fire.
- Teiser: What street was it on?
- Kniesche: On Greenwich Street. That's right going through the garden [of Mr. Kniesche's residence at 1274 Filbert Street]. I remodeled the building.
- Teiser: You bought that right when you came to San Francisco?
- Kniesche: Nooo! Heck, I was stone broke! I was lucky I had something to eat. Later I bought all this property. In fact, my wife bought it. She wanted it, and I bought it. She made very good deals, very good deals. Quite a little bit of property up on the hill.
- Teiser: When you first saw San Francisco, was there rebuilding going on by then?
- Kniesche: It was cleaning up, more so than building. I'll tell you what you saw on the streets when you stood down below the Ferry Building, and you looked up through the city. It looked like it would be a harbor there, but nothing but masts standing there. All that was left was the smokestacks. All the houses were down, and the smokestacks were standing up there. [laughs] It looked just like it would be a fleet there.
- There was a [street] railroad strike. You couldn't use the streetcar, and shooting was going on. It really was awful tough. So in September I started to work in Tait's Cafe, September the sixth,* Tait's restaurant, the
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- *Mr. Kniesche must have arrived in San Francisco in late August or early September, 1907, judging by the September 6 date in his diary and the fact that the streetcar strike ended September 13.

Kniesche: best restaurant in town. I had a lot of guts. I was a small one, but I had a lot of guts. I worked ten days and then I quit, I had a hard head. If they don't like it, right away I quit. On the thirtieth I [still] had nothing; I didn't find anything yet to work. My wonderful times--starting in again with nothing!

Teiser: You worked at Tait's on Van Ness Avenue?

Kniesche: Yes. And on Van Ness Avenue was the Pompeian Gardens. Believe me, that Van Ness Avenue was beautiful. There was all palm trees in the center, and the candelabra around there, and with divided street. It was really beautiful, San Francisco! And they ruined it all.

You know--I tell you something. We talk about San Francisco after the fire. Fillmore Street was the night life, like Broadway today, or things like that. Van Ness was the high-class stores. Then on the street, they had all palms in the middle, in the center.

Teiser: They did?

Kniesche: All the way down Van Ness Avenue to Fisherman's Wharf, it had palms there. It was beautiful. Of course, it looked like a southern town. Then when the city bought the United Railroad--we had a five-cent fare at that time, and they wanted to raise it to ten cents, and the city wouldn't do it. That's why we pay twenty-five cents now! [laughter] Then they took all the palms out of Van Ness Avenue and put them on Dolores Street.

Over where the school is on Van Ness Avenue, there was the Spreckels mansion, all out of marble! It was beautiful, I tell you. All the millionaires were living down there, on Van Ness Avenue.

To they took the palms out, and when they bought the railroads, they put in railroad tracks for the streetcars. They ruined the whole doggone Van Ness Avenue!

Teiser: Now they have some trees back there.

Kniesche: Now they have all automobiles there. I tell you, from the Ferry Building to Van Ness Avenue and Fisherman's Wharf-- everything was all down. There wasn't a house up here on the hill, except three.

Teiser: On the west side of Russian Hill?

Kniesche: That's right. They were all down. You never saw anything like it! Down below, from here to Van Ness Avenue, they dynamited all the buildings down, so the fire couldn't go past Van Ness Avenue. They stopped it there.

Teiser: And you could still see the dynamited buildings when you came?

Kniesche: Oh, yes absolutely! There was nothing built up yet. Everything was standing there, only the smokestacks was there, the flues. They were all way up--looked like ships were laying in the city. [laughs]

Teiser: I think you told us before we started taping that at one time, Germans lived in one part of the city and--

Kniesche: That's right. They lived in Noe Valley. The Italians was living in the northern waterfront down here. The French people were living up on the outskirts, where the French Hospital is up there.

Teiser: French Hospital is on Geary Boulevard.

Kniesche: Yes. Chinatown was here the way it is now--but smaller, much smaller. Now they [Chinese] are buying up property left and right. That was all there was there. There wasn't other people there.

Teiser: When you first came here, you din't live in Noe Valley?

Kniesche: No, no, no. I lived on Pine Street, Pine between Van Ness Avenue and Franklin Street.

Teiser: I was looking you up in the San Francisco city directories, and I found that in 1914, you lived at 351 Jones.

Kniesche: That's right. That was a small hotel.

Teiser: You were near your work?

Kniesche: I tell you, you walked to work at that time.

Teiser: Then in 1918, you were living at 1462 Sixteenth Avenue.

Kniesche: That's right. I had a bungalow there. That was the end of the town, Sixteenth Avenue. After that, the sand dunes. The Sahara desert started, with all the sand fleas in the world! [laughter]

Teiser: How did you get the job at Tait's?

Kniesche: I went in there and said I wanted a waiter's job. He looked at me and said, "You don't want a waiter's job. You want a busboy's job." I said, "No, but I tell you what you can do. If I don't make the grade, you can fire me tomorrow." I was well-dressed, and I represented something. He said, "Leave your good clothes home, and then come to work." I only had one suit anyhow. [laughter]

Teiser: What did you wear at work in those days?

Kniesche: Black pants and an alpaca jacket.

Teiser: White shirt?

Kniesche: And a white shirt.

Teiser: Did you have detachable collars?

Kniesche: Yes, you had detachable collars that you had to put on. That was the style at that time.

Teiser: They were expensive to keep laundered, weren't they?

Kniesche: Everything was cheap. Everything was cheap. A haircut was thirty-five cents, and a shave was fifteen cents, and a glass of beer was five cents. Whiskey was ten cents. Everything was cheap. I have the bill of fare from 1908 of the Bismarck at Fourth and Market Street. They had a sixteen piece orchestra, and the entrees were thirty-five cents. [laughter]

Teiser: What was Tait's like? Was it an expensive restaurant?

Kniesche: It was an expensive restaurant, Tait's.

Teiser: What kind of food did they have?

Kniesche: Cosmopolitan.

Teiser: Did they serve wines and beer?

Kniesche: Oh yes--wines and beer.

Teiser: Did they have a bar?

Kniesche: Yes, on the side. They had a regular bar room on the side; you sit there and then they let you in the dining room. It was on O'Farrell Street. Opposite O'Farrell Street was the Orpheum Theater. That was the time when Kolb and Dill were playing. And vaudeville and acrobatic stunts--it was beautiful. We haven't got those kind of shows any more.

Teiser: Did you get lots of people coming to dinner before the theater?

Kniesche: They went to dinner before they went to the theater, and when they came out of the theater back to the restaurants. We had lots of theaters here. Fourth and Market Street at twelve o'clock was just like it was twelve o'clock noon--crowded. Everybody came from the theaters and went back to the restaurants again.

Teiser: What did they eat late at night?

Kniesche: Welsh rarebit or oyster loaf or something like that. They had a heck of a good time. [laughter] Really, it was nice. San Francisco was nice.

I've been in lots of jobs but sometimes you had no job and you gambled your money away--you were broke!

Teiser: You said that in Los Angeles people were quite different from in New York. Were San Franciscans more like New Yorkers, or were they different still?

Kniesche: They were completely different; it was a different clientele altogether.

Teiser: What were they like?

Kniesche: Honest and rough, but good. You couldn't commit a crime and get away with it--oh no! Anybody committed a rape, he hung on the tree the next day; there was no trial. It was a clean city, but it was wide open; it was wide open. There was no trouble of any kind.

Teiser: You said they didn't tip in Los Angeles. Did they tip in San Francisco?

Kniesche: Well, not from the start. Do you know when the tipping started?

Teiser: When?

Kniesche: When the American soldier came to Europe, and they'd just throw their money away. They had so much money, they got so much for their money, that they were all millionaires, by heck, and they spent it like water. That's where the tipping came from, from Europe.

Teiser: And when they came home they still tipped?

Kniesche: Well, yes, they'd still throw their money away; naturally, it gets in your system.

Teiser: When you were working in New York, did you depend upon tips for part of your income?

Kniesche: A little bit, yes. I got six dollars a week sometimes.

Teiser: In tips?

Kniesche: No, in wages.

Teiser: And then how much in tips?

Kniesche: Oh, I don't know--very little.

Teiser: And none in Los Angeles?

Kniesche: Los Angeles very little too, because there was a different clientele altogether in Los Angeles.

Teiser: How about San Francisco when you first came--no tips?

Kniesche: Well, I want to tell you something: If you had a party of six, you'd get twenty-five cents. [laughter]

Teiser: You said that Tait's had another name.

Kniesche: They called it the Pompeian Gardens.

Teiser: It later became Tait-Zinkand, didn't it?

Kniesche: That was later on, Tait-Zinkand. They went together afterwards, and then they went on O'Farrell Street.

Teiser: You said the Heidelberg, where you worked next, was a small restaurant?

Kniesche: It could seat about 150 people, I guess.

Teiser: Was the food good?

- Kniesche: The food was good. It was plain food. At that time, the cooking was good all over. There was German food, French food, Italian food and Chinese food. There was a Bavarian place. There was no American place. They were all foreigners.
- Teiser: Were the ingredients that they got better, the food that they bought--was that better then?
- Kniesche: It was more wholesome. Nothing was frozen. Now everything is frozen. It was different altogether.
- Kniesche III: You were working November 6? [looking at 1907 diary entry]
- Kniesche: In the Old Heidelberg, on Turk Street. [laughs] It was easy to get five-cents' tip. There were good customers there who gave ten cents. Most of them gave nothing.
- Well, the bad times are starting in now.
- Kniesche III: This is the end of 1907?
- Kniesche: Yes. Until the end of December. [reading diary] There are a lot of people out of work, and a shortage of money. But slowly, slowly, it's getting better, little by little.
- Kniesche III: You were working though, weren't you?
- Kniesche: I don't know yet. Maybe I was retired already. [laughter] [reading] "I'm not satisfied with myself anymore. Everything goes too slow. I can't get ahead with nothing. Now I want to see what the new year will bring. I hope it's better than the last one. The shortage of money seems to be over, and I have a hell of a good time in San Francisco." And on February the tenth [1908], I quit again! I do that better than anything else! [laughter]
- Kniesche III: That was from the Heidelberg?
- Kniesche: Yes. So on the thirteenth, I took a trip to Los Angeles. [reading] "It is pretty warm, and the oranges are ripe. I'm sick in my stomach. Again, I can't work." I had the yellow jaundice. I looked like a Filipino, all yellow. My God, I hardly could stand on my feet. "Today, I am a little better."
- Kniesche III: That was down in L.A.?

Kniesche: Yes. I looked for work. We went down there to play the horses! [laughter] To make money fast! I was a fiend by then, with the horses. Oh, yes. I went to the racetrack, and I was floored, naturally.

Kniesche III: What?

Kniesche: I lost my money again. I had a hell of a time! "I could cuss myself! But I can't help it, I can't stop it. I have everything in hock again." The work I hadn't got. "It doesn't look like I can get any." March the eighth, I haven't got no work yet. I have a thirty-dollar debt. I'm willing, if I can get a job in San Francisco. I had the pest, what you call the flu. I returned to San Francisco to find work.

"April the twelfth--this night, I sure thought I'm going to kick the bucket! I couldn't get any air. I couldn't sleep. I had a room with another guy. [reads first in German] He was awake all night. Well, the next day I felt a little better. [reads something more in German] "I'm always sick."

Kniesche III: You're always sick in San Francisco?

Kniesche: "The climate bothers me." Cold, windy, you know. "I want to get some money together to go to Seattle." [laughter] I was the greatest kind to get a job, quit a job, get a job, go around here. At that time, if the moon had been there, I would have gone to the moon, I guess. [much laughter] "I paid all my debts, and I have again fifteen dollars, and that's burning in my pocket." [laughter]

Kniesche III: You went back down to L.A. again?

Kniesche: Yes. "And here, where I'm working now, I won't last! [laughs] I think I'm going to go to Seattle." Here it is April the twenty-ninth, and naturally, I quit my job. [laughter] On the fourth day, I'm in San Francisco. "I arrived in San Francisco today. The trip through California is wonderful--all the flowers and everything else."

The Bismarck Cafe

Kniesche: Now comes this-- [reads first in German] I went to work in the Bismarck.

Kniesche III: In the Bismarck Cafe?

Kniesche: Yes. I knew the headwaiter. I worked with the headwaiter in New York, from there.

Kniesche III: What was the headwaiter's name?

Kniesche: It just came to me. Persing.

Kniesche III: What date was that?

Kniesche: On May the first.

Kniesche III: May 1, 1908?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: It sounds like you finally settled down.

Kniesche: Yes. It [the Bismarck] just opened up. On the opening day, there were fifteen hundred people.

Kniesche III: Fifteen hundred?

Kniesche: Yes. Everything went off nicely. They had a celebration there. The fleet came into town. They had thirty thousand sailors and officers parading in the street.

Kniesche III: What day was that?

Kniesche: May the ninth.

"Last week I lost forty dollars on the ponies."
 [laughter] "Now I have twenty dollars left, so they get most of it." I won them all on paper, but I couldn't win it when the money was down.

Kniesche III: You never seemed to come out of that hole.

Kniesche: [reading] "I placed ten dollars to win and ten dollars for place." That was my twenty dollars. I was with the rich, I won fifty dollars. [laughs] The very last day of the races, I lost twenty dollars. [reading in German]--

Kniesche III: What?

Kniesche: "I'm gonna quit gambling now.! Like hell! [laughs] I started again gambling, sure! [laughter] I can't let it go. In three days, I won a hundred dollars. Oy, oh yes. On the paper, I won every Saturday handicap. So I said to myself, "When I get myself a hundred dollars together, I play it." I had a hundred dollars here, and I played Sugar Mate, a hundred dollars. Naturally, the horse lost. [laughter]

I won them all on paper, but I couldn't win it when the money was down. So, I have no luck. "If I only could look in the future, what will become of me, I think I would get a big surprise. - But I'm still full of hope. What's gone is gone, and you start from fresh again.

"Today I wanted to go to the country. Of course, I had to stop in the poolroom." [laughter] [reads something in German]

Kniesche III: What?

Kniesche: We got pinched!

Kniesche III: You were arrested?

Kniesche: Arrested, and then we were all taken from the saloon to the jail.

Kniesche III: What's the date on that?

Kniesche: That was in August, August the thirteenth, 1908 . No wonder I lost my money! [laughter] I missed my train and everything else. "Today I was in Sausalito in the poolroom, I lost twenty dollars. It's high time that I get to the country, otherwise I can't go." [laughter] You know what we paid there? We paid there eighteen dollars a week, room and board.

Kniesche III: For a vacation?

Kniesche: Yes, in Sonoma. We went three weeks on a vacation.

Kniesche III: Oh, so you were on your way to your vacation that time, and you got arrested, and then the next day you spent in Sausalito and you lost twenty dollars?

Kniesche: Yes. I lost the twenty dollars. I saved myself some money.

Kniesche III: Were you going with friends?

Kniesche: I think so. No, I went that time to Point Sur. My friend was there before. Went to the movies, and he comes out with a woman. He'd make friends with anybody. She was the lighthouse keeper's wife. And he hooked up there, and she invites him in the lighthouse, and he goes up to the lighthouse, and he writes me I should come there and visit them. So I go down there too.

Kniesche III: This was the time when you had the three weeks off?

Kniesche: Yes. I get down there too. They fiddled around, and the guy was in the lighthouse and then they argued, and I had to straighten everything out again. I had a hell of a time. This guy, [laughs] he could bring any woman out of there, when he went in there [to the movies].

Well, anyhow, so I went to Monterey, overnight or late in the morning when the stage went. In Monterey I couldn't sleep. The bedbugs were crawling up and they'd all drop down on the bed. There were so many bedbugs in there that I sat on the chair. I couldn't sleep that night. They were all full of bedbugs--big ones.

In the morning--the city is half-Spanish and half-English--it took thirty-six miles with the stagecoach [to Point Sur], four horses going down those country roads, just wide enough for the wagon, and then the water down below there. Jesus, it's a funny feeling. [laughter] Well, we got there. When we got off the road, then I had to walk four miles to the lighthouse.

Kniesche III: You went down by yourself?

Kniesche: Yes. And while we were up there, one day we went fishing while we were there.

Kniesche III: What month is this?

Kniesche: This was the eighth of September. Then we went hunting from there and then fishing. The tide was coming in, and we didn't know anything about the tides. We were sitting up there on the rocks fishing, and all at once a wave came in and took us off the rocks, took us out, and the next wave pushed us back in again in. Up we scrambled! If the tide would have gone out, we could have been still out there! [laughter] But the tide was coming in, so it pushed us right back again. Nobody would have known anything what could have happened to us, both of us. My watch was on the bum, and everything else from the sea water.

Kniesche: But we had a wonderful time there. Then we went back to San Francisco.

Kniesche III: The two of you?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Where did you know this guy from, George Hendschel?

Kniesche: Here, from San Francisco. We met here together. We lived in the same house.

Kniesche III: Oh, you did. You worked together?

Kniesche: I think so. I think we worked at the Bismarck together. Now I'm back to San Francisco.

Kniesche III: What month?

Kniesche: In September, the seventh. It's bitter cold here in San Francisco. It was nice and warm in Monterey there. Now I laid off two weeks--to play the races!

On December the fourth, I had to start work again, because I lost everything. The first day, I lost a hundred dollars, and then I lost it all. I went completely flat again. I don't know, I was all at once dissatisfied. I didn't get ahead. You can't get ahead when you play the horses anyhow. I found that out later on.

[reading] "You know, I have a lot of nice friends in San Francisco, but they only have one bad habit. They all gamble, they all play the horses. I can't do without it. I think that the best thing for me is if I go back East again. Then I would get a good wife, and maybe I can stop gambling." Well, I got a good wife, but I couldn't stop gambling anyhow. I kept on gambling because that was more interesting to me than anything else.

"Today we had another earthquake."

Kniesche III: What day was that?

Kniesche: On the twelfth, November the twelfth. [reading something in German]

Kniesche III: [translating] For ten seconds.

Kniesche: Then on the twenty-second, we had another earthquake. Almost every day it's shaking. It's the coldest weather we had in twenty years. They had a big earthquake in Italy on the twenty-ninth of December.

Kniesche III: What's this? Today is [reads in German]--

Kniesche: [translating] New Year's.

Kniesche III: So you quit writing on the first of January, 1909.

Teiser: Would you tell us about the Bismarck?

Kniesche: It was the first restaurant opened up in the Pacific Building on Fourth and Market Street when the Miller brothers came out from St. Louis, from the Exposition in St. Louis. They came out and renovated the basement down there and put a restaurant there and called it the Bismarck. That was in 1908, and I worked there. At that time we got twenty-five dollars a month; we worked thirty-one days sometimes when the month had thirty-one days. (It was different at that time. People worked, and nobody died from overwork.) We made a little money on the side. But the food was good, and the prices were so cheap that you could get an entree for thirty cents. Everything was very cheap. And a sixteen-piece orchestra played at the Bismarck.

Teiser: Did Tait's have an orchestra too?

Kniesche: They had just a string orchestra; I think about four pieces.

Teiser: The Bismarck was German?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Was the food good?

Kniesche: Very good. The biggest places in San Francisco were German places.

Teiser: How many people did the Bismarck seat?

Kniesche: About four hundred. It was the whole basement down there.

Teiser: What were their specialties?

Kniesche: Chicken, beef, sour beef, veal shanks, and all these kinds of things. We have still the same, some of it now [at Schroeder's Cafe]. Really, it was nice there.

Teiser: How about bread--was bread different then than now?

Kniesche: My dear lady, we had bread! Right now we have junk; there is no bread. When we buy cake, my wife puts it back in the oven and bakes it again, because it's so soft and doughy.

Kniesche: But the people like it. I don't--I like mine well baked. And we still have our bread baked--we have it double baked. That's why we still have good bread.

Teiser: At Schroeder's.

Kniesche: They come down there and they love the rye bread, they love the pumpernickel, which they wouldn't eat in any other place, because we know how to handle it.

Teiser: The baker bakes it specially for you?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: In those days, how about the wines and the beer--how were they?

Kniesche: Everything was good and cheap. A glass of beer was five cents.

Teiser: Was it good beer?

Kniesche: You couldn't buy it no more today. It was really lager beer; it was aged. And the wine--ten cents a glass.

Teiser: Was it good wine?

Kniesche: We had wine makers, and then we came along with Prohibition and knocked out all they had. Then we had only Dago red or Dago white. They took everything what was good away from you and gave you something rotten.

In 1915 I was working at the Bismarck Cafe [still].

Kniesche III: What did you do there?

Kniesche: Waiter.

Kniesche III: Did you have any interest in it, except as waiter?

Kniesche: Interest in it? I was glad I had a pair of shoes on my feet! [chuckles] I'd been floating around from one thing to another, and the rest went to the horses. I was only thinking about the profit I was out if they would shovel the manure out.

Kniesche III: Didn't you know somebody, though, at the Bismarck Cafe originally?

Kniesche: I knew the headwaiter, the boss. But that has nothing to do with it, for God's sake. That's all--that was a big place. It was five times bigger than Schroeder's--

Kniesche III: Really?

Kniesche: Well, anyhow, in 1915, I worked the Bismarck Cafe as a waiter. Naturally, when I worked there, I played the beautiful horses. Every time I made some money, I lost it. Today I was rich, tomorrow I was poor. That's the way it went for me. From one end to another--there was no end to it.

So in 1915, when we had the Exposition in San Francisco, then I went on the racetrack at Van Ness Avenue, and I made the last bet on the last day of the Exposition. Then I swore that I never would play the horses again. And I kept my word, up to today. I haven't played no horses, no more gambling. I came to my senses.

Then I started to work at Beth's Cafe, 1916.

Teiser: You had stayed working at the Bismarck for quite a while, then, had you not?

Kniesche: Yes, for quite a while.

Teiser: Did you like it?

Kniesche: Well, it was the best place in town at that time.

Teiser: Did your salary go up as the years went by?

Kniesche: No, no. It stayed the way it was for quite a while.

The Bismarck was a big place, beautiful place! The whole basement was like a garden with fruit trees. There were apple trees, pear trees, and everything--fresco work, you know? Beautifully, I tell you, that place was fixed up. It was just not a plain barn. It was beautifully fixed up. But things were cheap. They [the Miller brothers] came from St. Louis.

Teiser: They later went broke?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Why, do you think?

Kniesche: The system broke them.

Teiser: What was that?

Kniesche: I want to tell you something. When I came out to San Francisco, they had no system. They had a cashier sitting in the kitchen and a cashier sitting outside. You paid when you took food from the kitchen, for cash, and then you paid the cashier. You collected it. When the Bismarck came in, they brought the New York system along. I had worked with it in New York already at that time--what they call the stopluck system. Every time you took something out of the kitchen, you had to write an order with a duplicate, one for the kitchen and one for the customer's check. You give every penny to the kitchen or the bar.

So those poor fellows that never worked with a system like that, they stood back there and they wrote and wrote and wrote and couldn't wait any customers. So lots of the waiters left their tables and walked off. They couldn't make it.

After two weeks from opening day, they were still sorting the tickets from the first day. Then it didn't work. They took the whole thing and put them in the boiler downstairs, and the fire burned everything up, and they had no system. [laughter] And then they went broke, naturally.

Teiser: Were most of the waiters honest?

Kniesche: Oh yes, I think so.

Teiser: But the system was too much for them?

Kniesche: Yes. I tell you something else: a system is bad when you over-systematize it. It's bad. I have it right now with the machines what I have [the electric cash registers]. Right now, there's too much system. When the other fellow took [the Bismarck] over afterwards, Hirsch, he had the cash on the line. They paid cash, and he made a success out of that place.

Teiser: H.L. Hirsch, who was the manager?

Kniesche: He was the boss. He was the proprietor afterwards. He bought the Bismarck Cafe.

Teiser: How long had it lasted under no system?

Kniesche: About three years. That's all.

Teiser: That same man Hirsch is listed as the manager of the Hof Brau.

Kniesche: They called it the Hof Brau after the Bismarck. They took the name down and they called it the Hof Brau.

Teiser: Oh, I see. They just changed the name, not the restaurant.

Kniesche: No, no. Same restaurant. They just changed the name. And he put in around the edges all boxes, every box from one state and another state and another. He put all boxes around there.

Teiser: What do you mean, "boxes" from every state?

Kniesche: Well, they had booths there from all the states, and they had a name on top of each one--the New York, the Pennsylvania and so forth.*

Teiser: They were the old-fashioned kind, with curtains?

Kniesche: No, they had no curtains. Some restaurants, they had curtains. But that was open, because there were a lot of children, and no monkey business! [laughs]

Working and Living in San Francisco

Teiser: Did you belong to the union?

Kniesche: Yes, and I stayed with the union. When I came up to [a hearing before] the executive board, I'd been around the world. I had the experiences of a forty year old man when I was about twenty-eight. When I spoke up there, and they said something, but before they shut their mouths I had the answer. They didn't like me.

Teiser: What executive board was this?

*The name was later changed again to the States Restaurant.

- Kniesche: From the waiters' union. I think this was in 1915, when they had that big banquet. I signed up--I was out of a job, so I signed up. They politely scratched me out. They didn't want me. I said, "Okay, if I can't get on your side, I go on the other side!" This happened. [Chuckles]*
- Teiser: What was the big banquet in 1915? Was that in connection with the fair [Panama-Pacific Exposition]?
- Kniesche: The fair, yes. With all the fairs then, the city gives a big banquet.
- Teiser: Was it held at the fairground?
- Kniesche: Yes, of course, because there wasn't a city hall. In 1915, it wasn't built yet.
- Teiser: People always talk about what a wonderful fair that was.
- Kniesche: It was a wonderful fair. The Tower of Jewels and Van Ness Avenue--it was beautiful that day. It was really pretty. They came in automobiles for the night parade. They had those great big trucks with the horses. The horses pulled those trucks that time, because the automobile was just coming in.
- I know, because I had a 1915 Maxwell, the same as Jack Benny's.
- Teiser: You must have been pretty prosperous to have a car like that then.
- Kniesche: Well, I'll tell you what it is. I paid six hundred and fifty dollars new, and I had it two years and sold it for eight hundred and fifty, because cars were scarce. It was cheap.
- Teiser: At the 1915 fair, were there good restaurants?
- Kniesche: At the fair? Yes. There were good restaurants there.
- Teiser: You were in between jobs then, part of the time?
- Kniesche: Yes.
- Teiser: Did you work at any of the restaurants at the fair?

*See p. 51

- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: Did the fact that you were a member of the union make a difference in where you could get jobs then?
- Kniesche: No, but you had to be a member of the union. Otherwise, they pull the whole crew out. You had to. (They got the upper hand right now. Right now, the union and politics are ruining the world.)
- Teiser: When did you join the union?
- Kniesche: I joined the union in 1911 or 1912. The other organization that I used to belong to was the German Waiters' Club.
- Teiser: When you said they didn't want you to work at the 1915 banquet,* you mean they made you get out of the union?
- Kniesche: No, I stayed in the union.
- Teiser: They didn't want you for the job?
- Kniesche: They didn't want me for the job. In other words, on the red-letter days, when you put in, they scratch you off, you know, if there's somebody they didn't like. [laughs]
- Teiser: Did they let everybody belong to the union who wanted to?
- Kniesche: Yes, yes.
- Teiser: Were there any black waiters in the union then?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: None?
- Kniesche: Not a one. When I came to San Francisco, there was not a Negro in town, except in Alameda; the porters were there. When a Negro came in down there at any bar, they'd serve him but when he was finished with his drink the bartender would break the glass right in front of him. It was different altogether. When I see that today from Van Ness Avenue to the beach, it's all black. There was all the middle-class there--people who worked there.
- Teiser: When you first came to San Francisco, where did you live?
- Kniesche: On Pine and Franklin.

* See p. 50.

Teiser: Did you have a room there?

Kniesche: Yes, a furnished room.

Teiser: How much did you pay?

Kniesche: I think I paid five dollars.

Teiser: A week?

Kniesche: No, a month. [laughter]

Teiser: And you ate in the restaurant?

Kniesche: Yes, in the restaurant.

Teiser: When you worked in a place like the Bismarck or Tait's, did you get breakfast at the restaurant too?

Kniesche: No. They're not open for breakfast. None of them. Lunch and dinner and supper.

Teiser: Did your landlady get your breakfast, or did you have to eat in a restaurant?

Kniesche: Oh, I'd get a cup of coffee or something like that, like we do now.

Teiser: In a restaurant?

Kniesche: Yes. You know, people come in and take a doughnut and a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

Teiser: I've been reading about the history of the restaurant labor unions.* In 1916, the unions asked the restaurant employers' association for an eight-hour day, and the restaurant association said no, but they could have nine hours in a thirteen-hour period.

Kniesche: Well, something like that.

Teiser: A man named Hugo Ernst was the union leader.

Kniesche: Ernst, I knew him well.

*Robert Knight, Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918, University of California Press, 1960.

Teiser: Was he a full-time union--?

Kniesche: --organizer.

Teiser: Was he good?

Kniesche: Good? None of them are any good! [laughs] To my way of thinking.

Teiser: Finally the unions struck five restaurants, and then a lot of the employers--150--locked out the unions.

Kniesche: Yes. They [the unions] didn't win then. They didn't win because they weren't that strong and organized.

Teiser: At the end of the year, they gave up.

Kniesche: They did. Right now, there's so many of them they have to belong to the union, and lots of them don't belong to the union, especially the coffee shops and soup shops. They don't belong to the unions. But we [Schroeder's Cafe] have to pay for every man--I think it's eighty-five dollars a month--health and welfare, strike funds and this thing like that. The officials--they all wash their hands in it! They take it away from one place and they make stuff at the other place.

Teiser: When that 1916 strike was on, in which restaurant were you working?

Kniesche: I worked at Beth's Cafe, opposite from the Hof Brau Haus, in the basement. Then in '18, he went broke. That fellow went broke at Beth's.

"That's When I got My Start"

Teiser: Adolph H. Beth was the owner?

Kniesche: Yes, he went broke. Then in 1918 we took it over from the brewery--three of us waiters. First we had about ten waiters [interested in buying it together], and then you fool around and you fool around. Finally we came down to three. [T.M. Kniesche, Martin Kluge and Frank Lindstrom] We got it from the brewery almost for nothing.

Teiser: How did the brewery happen to have it?

Kniesche: Well, they sold their beer there, and I guess Beth owed them money, you see.

Teiser: How much did you pay for it? Do you remember?

Kniesche: I think we signed a note for two thousand dollars, which we never had to pay. Then we made a little alteration. When we opened up, we had fifty dollars in the cash register. If we wouldn't have made it, we would have been broke before we started.

Teiser: You signed a note for two thousand, for the three of you, and you never did have to pay it?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: Why not?

Kniesche: They wrote it off. They wrote it off. It was the Weinhardt Brewery from Portland. Then we started in. We changed the name to the Nurnberg. Martin Kluge, he was older than I was, and Frank Lindstrom. He was older than both of us, but he didn't have the spunk. He stayed a waiter. I went behind the bar, and Martin Kluge went on the floor and watched everything and did the bookkeeping. I sure learned a lot!

We had good help. Generally, the eating wasn't so very good. We couldn't make it go with eating. Then we put in dancing. We had the best dance orchestra in San Francisco which ever will come again! When they played you had to dance! Then we did such a business that the people were standing on the steps trying to get in. From nothing, we had a good business. Believe me, then we really packed them in! We made good money. That's when I got my start.

I had Paul Ash. He came to San Francisco as a piano player. Monte Barden was the trombone player. Abe was the drummer, and Silvio Savant, he was the accordian player.

Anyway, I had a five-piece orchestra, and when they played you had to dance! Ah, when they played the Ratatsky March! [Beats time on the table] I tell you, you had to get up and dance.

Paul Ash lived with me when he came. He was absolutely broke. A lot of us were broke anyhow, but he was absolutely broke.

Teiser: How'd you come across him?

Kniesche: I was there in the right time in the right place.

Teiser: He came to see you?

Kniesche: Yes, when I lived on Forty-eighth Avenue at that time, out at the beach. I took him in. When he went down to play music, he didn't have a tuxedo. He had a blue suit, and then he turned it over to look like a tuxedo. You know, his real name was Aschenbrenner. He cut it down to Ash.

Teiser: Was he German?

Kniesche: Well, he was Jewish.

Teiser: Of German heritage?

Kniesche: He was a German Jew.

Teiser: Born in Germany?

Kniesche: I think so. We had some orchestra! My God! I remember I loved to dance myself! If it's good music, I get up and dance right now! [laughter]

Teiser: No wonder you wanted an orchestra! Ash had been a musician before?

Kniesche: Oh, a good musician! Grand, and a good showman. You know, when he played the rhapsody of Liszt--Da da da da da da. [beats time on the table] Then he collapsed over the piano, and all those kind of things. [laughter]

Teiser: He went on to become quite famous. Did you stay friends with him for many years?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. Sometimes if I went to the prize fight, and he saw me sitting there, he got up there and they played the salute, and he'd say, "See that little fellow sitting down there? He took me in when I was absolutely broke!" in front of all the other people.

Teiser: You by then had established a home, you and Mrs. Kniesche?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Well, that was good of you to take him in.

Kniesche: Well, I did a lot of good things, and got a lot of dirty tricks in return many times. But I remember when I was hungry, and that's been with me all my life. I remember what I went through, and it was no picnic.

Teiser: So it's worth taking a chance on somebody else?

Kniesche: Well, if it's gone, it's gone.

Teiser: How many people could you seat in the Nurnberg?

Kniesche: Well, it was not such a small place. About 150, 200.

Teiser: Was there a dance floor, or did you have to make one?

Kniesche: We had to make one.

Teiser: So you lost some tables?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: You must have had to pay an orchestra a good deal.

Kniesche: Yes, but in proportion the food was cheap, the orchestra was cheap. Today they cost a fortune, I tell you.

Teiser: You stayed at the bar, Kluge stayed on the floor, and Lindstrom was a waiter. Who knew how to run a kitchen?

Kniesche: We had a chef. I still believe in that. The cook, if you know the business, you can hire him. But the bosses belong out there where the money is! [thumps table for emphasis] If the boss goes in the kitchen and cooks, then everybody else runs the business. I don't believe in that because that doesn't make sense.

Teiser: How do you control a cook in that way?

Kniesche: If a dish goes out of the kitchen, and I pass by, I can tell you if it's good or no good, without anything else.

Teiser: Could you then? When you were that young?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Who bought the food?

Kniesche: Martin Kluge. He did the buying. The minute you let somebody else buy, then the shenanigans go on. I've seen too much of that business.

Teiser: How did Kluge know how to buy? Had he done that before?

Kniesche: Yes, he had experience. He dealt with people. I dealt with the butcher for years when I was in the Beth's Cafe, and at Schroeder's I still had the same butcher.

Teiser: He delivered?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: You'd phone him or something?

Kniesche: Yes, and then pay him by the week.

Teiser: How about produce?

Kniesche: It's the same business, all over the same. They all delivered at that time. At Schroeder's right now, we have all commission merchants deliver.

Teiser: Mr. Kluge didn't go down and look at the produce?

Kniesche: No, no. But you see, if they don't put in the right things, they get hell.

Anyhow, we started in with the Nurnberg, the three of us. We made good money, and believe me, I got on my feet beautifully.

Teiser: In that period, what were your prices? How much were your entrees, for instance?

Kniesche: They weren't more than thirty cents.

Teiser: What kind of a meal could you get for a dollar there?

Kniesche: For a dollar, you could buy an interest in the business! [laughter] I tell you, they were a lot bigger than portions what you get today. The only thing what was high at that time already was French pastry. That was high already. You would pay thirty cents for an entree and fifteen cents for dessert. That was high at that time.

Business stayed good for about a year or so. Then Prohibition came along and overnight I was through!

Teiser: Did you keep going until the last moment that you could?

Kniesche: Til the last day. When Prohibition came along, I got out. Martin Kluge stayed in, and he got somebody else in--an undesirable. They bootlegged.

- Teiser: What was it like in San Francisco for Germans during the first world war? You were working at a clearly German restaurant.
- Kniesche: Well, I tell you something. They didn't draft the married men, so I wasn't drafted.
- Teiser: You were a citizen by then?
- Kniesche: Oh, yes. I was a citizen right after five years and five days. I didn't waste no time.
- Teiser: I know that there was a lot of prejudice against people of German heritage--even if they were Americans--in the United States at that time.
- Kniesche: Yes.
- Teiser: Was there in San Francisco?
- Kniesche: Yes, but not that bad.
- Teiser: Did it affect the German restaurants? Did people still come there to eat?
- Kniesche: Yes, yes. No, it didn't affect any, but we had to change the name.
- Teiser: What did you change it to?
- Kniesche: To the Elite. From the Nurnberg to the Elite.
- Teiser: Did you change the kind of food that you served, or the decorations?
- Kniesche: Well, the hamburger steak was Liberty Steak. French-fried potatoes were Liberty Potatoes. [laughter] We called it Liberty, but the liberty wasn't there. Anyhow, everything went to "Liberty." [laughter]
- Teiser: Did anybody ever make you feel insulted during the war?
- Kniesche: Oh heck, yes. Especially the kids. [laughs] That's all. How that war came about, I tell you, just like I told you before.*

*In the discussion prior to the interview.

Teiser: How?

Kniesche: England was slipping. Germany was coming, like the Japs came up later on, years after this war. Germany was coming up, and they took all the business away. Things that went to South America, made in Germany, they would buy it. They would buy it all over. They got so prosperous under William II, and he was a good ruler, because they had already a monarchy. They had already old-age pensions and had health insurance at that time, under that Kaiser.

He was efficient, and his colonies were kept in first class shape. There were all white houses and red roofs. They were helping the natives. They didn't exploit them. England and France--they couldn't see that, because they interfered with their colonies. You see? That's how it came.

Teiser: How did that bring it about, then? What was the effect?

Kniesche: The effect was there when the little things came, like they killed the Austrian crown prince. England started it, that they have to have a war. In the meantime, Wilson was our president. He promised that he would give them a hand to help them. That's how we get into the first world war.

The condition we have now--it's still from the first world war. It hasn't stopped yet. [laughs] It took them thousands of years to build the countries together, and we bust it all wide open! Every little country wants to have their own country, and they can't run themselves. Now they fight a war among themselves. It's a bad, bad, bad story.

The second world war--if it hadn't have been for the first world war, we wouldn't have no Hitler. We wouldn't have no Mussolini. We wouldn't have no Stalin. We wouldn't have no Churchill. We wouldn't have those fakers--I call them all fakers. The war would have come slowly.

Teiser: You think it was England that started it?

Kniesche: Yes. They had to start to stop Germany, because otherwise it would be powerful. You know how that started. I want to go further back there. When Teddy Roosevelt was president, and his term was up, he put in Taft. Taft was in for four years, with this understanding with Roosevelt that he should have resigned and he should come out and Roosevelt would come in again. Well, in his four years he went like this--nothing doing. So he stayed there.

Kniesche: So Roosevelt formed the Bull Moose party with Hiram Johnson from California as vice-president. You had that in school, I guess--I hope. They broke the Republican party in two, and Wilson won on the Democratic party. That's how he got it. Then the flyer--

Teiser: Lindbergh?

Kniesche: Lindbergh, he was right. He said we shouldn't go in another war. He was absolutely right. That was the craziest idea that there is, and we ruined the whole world. That's what you get. I bet you they don't teach that in school. But I've seen it with my own eyes. I lived it, and I saw it coming.

Prohibition

Teiser: Where did Kluge get his liquor when he continued running the restaurant?

Kniesche: That I don't know. I wasn't a bootlegger. He went from one bootlegger to the other. [chuckles] I tell you, he made a fortune. You know, we made good money. I got my start from the Nurnberg. I got a foundation. Then he stayed there, and he made a quarter of a million dollars. He had it all in the stock market, on margin. When the crash came along, he lost half of it. When the second bump came, he lost the rest of it.

Teiser: So it wasn't that he lost his money from bootlegging but that he lost in the stock market?

Kniesche: From being greedy! [laughter] From being greedy. I got out, and I stayed in the right business. I didn't monkey around.

Teiser: Did he get bothered by the police as a bootlegger?

Kniesche: Not that much. He must have paid pretty well, because from money you could do anything.

Teiser: In 1918, according to the city directory, Martin Kluge lived next door to you.

Kniesche: Two doors below.

Teiser: At 1450 Sixteenth Avenue. How did that happen? Just by chance?

Kniesche: No, we were good friends. He belonged to the family at that time. When Martin Kluge got married, then things busted up, because two women can't get along. One woman can get along with three men, but three men can't get along with one woman! [laughter] That's the old story.

Teiser: Was your other partner, Frank Lindstrom, a close friend, too?

Kniesche: Well, I knew him for a long time, but he was different. Not as close as Martin Kluge and I were. We were just like brothers. The other fellow figured a way to get energy from the waves!

Teiser: No!

Kniesche: This fellow [Lindstrom] was generally working on that wave-motor!

Teiser: Out on the beach?

Kniesche: Out on the beach.

Teiser: He was?

Kniesche: Yes, but he never got it perfect.

Teiser: He was the one who built that wave machine!

Kniesche: I don't know when it was built. It was going with the waves, see, but he couldn't get the electricity out of the waves. But he was working on it.

Teiser: I've seen photographs of some equipment that was out at Ocean Beach, a structure that was said to be the remains of a wave machine that somebody had tried to build. Was that his?

Kniesche: That was his.

Teiser: And he was the one who just wanted to be the waiter?

Kniesche: Yes, he always was the waiter and wanted to stay a waiter.

Teiser: After Kluge went broke during the Depression, what happened to him?

Kniesche: He went down. After he lost his money, then I staked him again. He went into a saloon opposite the Lindy Club. When you're once up and then way down again, you very, very seldom come up again. He couldn't make it either. He went

Kniesche: bust, and then he finished as a waiter. When he died he was absolutely broke, and my wife was the only one at the funeral.

Teiser: What happened to Lindstrom, finally?

Kniesche: He went into the duck business. He put too many ducks in one pen, and then they get scared, they all run together, and then they killed each other! [laughs]

They all went and tried something. I tried something else myself, and then I saw I was losing my shirt, I got the hell out of it!

I went in a place that makes magnasite tiles for store fronts. I had a small factory here. I lost about ten thousand dollars, and I said to myself that this is no place for me to stay, because I'm going to go broke.

Teiser: How did you happen to get into it? How'd you happen to think of it?

Kniesche: Some fellow talked me into it. If I go broke, it's very hard to get started again. So I got the fellows together, and I says, "Boys, you want the factory here for nothing? I owe nothing." "Sure." So I said, "All right, come here." So I think I had four or five men. They all signed on the line, and I took my hat and walked out. They had the factory.* That was the smartest thing I ever did, because I would have gone broke in there. You once go broke, and you're out. It was the smartest thing I ever did in my life. I took my loss and beat it! I said, "Never will I go in another business I don't know!"

So I stayed in what was my business. I went all through the Prohibition down at Schroeder's, didn't bootleg anything, made just barely a living, but I said, "There is something coming. They are not going to keep that up forever, because it doesn't make sense."

You can control it, but when they take everything away from you, then they revolt. Just like the smoking habit now. People be ninety years old, and they smoke all their lives. The other one, he smokes a couple of years and dies. It depends on how your constitution is. You can't stop it.

*See also pp. 63, 69-71.

Kniesche: It was 1920 when I got out of there [the tile company]. Then I took a trip to Europe in 1921. I sold my home. I had a home on Sixteenth Avenue and Judah Street. That was the end of the town at that time. Between Sixteenth Avenue and Forty-Seventh Avenue there was a Sahara desert. You know? It was all sand. [laughter] At nights when we'd get into bed, we would be soon troubled from the sand fleas. [laughter] The sand fleas were eating you alive! When you went to a show, you came out full of fleas. Oh, it was a flea town for sure.

Marriage

Teiser: When did you marry?

Kniesche: 1911. November fifth.

Teiser: Where did you meet your wife?

Kniesche: In New York. Now I'll tell you something. A friend of mine and myself went to New York in 1910. We went there and went in a bakery, and my future wife was working there. As we were sitting there, I said, "That's my girl!" [laughter] Just like that. "That's my girl." We were only there a short time, and then I went back here to California again, and I wrote her that I wanted to marry her, and she came out, because she couldn't get along with her stepmother. It was a very, very happy thing. I think it was the best thing in my life that I did.

Teiser: She came out here and married you?

Kniesche: She came out here.

Teiser: Was that the first time she'd been in San Francisco?

Kniesche: Yes. I tell you something--in all of my life, everything happened on the spur of the moment. Either I bought a piece of property that was in the right spot, or something else came along that was in the right spot. I don't know--I'm a fatalist.

Kniesche III: How did you meet Grandma?

Kniesche: I went with George Henschel to New York. We took a trip to New York in 1910.

Kniesche III: You were married in 1911?

Kniesche: Yes. I met her in a bakery. She was working in a bakery. When I saw her, I said to George, "This is my girl!" We talked, and went in a couple of times to talk, until finally--

Kniesche III: How long were you in New York that time?

Kniesche: Oh, about two weeks.

Kniesche III: That's all?

Kniesche: Because I didn't work, I just was pleasure-visiting, and then I went back to San Francisco.

Kniesche III: How did she come out to San Francisco?

Kniesche: With the train.

Kniesche III: Did she come out with you?

Kniesche: No, no, no, no. No, I wrote that I wanted to meet her. She had a stepmother.

Kniesche III: I didn't know that.

Kniesche: She couldn't get along with her very good. So I asked her to come out here, and she came out here. She took a hell of a chance. She didn't know very much, very young.

Kniesche III: What about her parents? Didn't they come out here then?

Kniesche: Later on they came.

Kniesche III: After you had Schroeder's?

Kniesche: Yes, later on they came. He was Joseph Manegold. He made the first California [automobile] top, with sliding curtains, sliding glass.

Kniesche III: Where did they live? Near you?

Kniesche: No. I don't know where they lived, any more. But they had a store on Bush and Franklin. His business was going good. He made good money, and he wanted to go back to Vienna.

Kniesche III: He did?

Kniesche: So while he was going good, he went back to Vienna, and left the business there. I think he was gone a year or so. Then he came back here, went back in the business. In the meantime, things had changed. They came out with sedans. There was no more California top, and he went broke.

Kniesche III: Then what happened to him?

Kniesche: He died of a heart attack.

Kniesche III: What about the stepmother?

Kniesche: She went back to Austria.

Kniesche III: Grandma had a very unhappy childhood?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Where was she born?

Kniesche: She was born in Graz, Austria. Came to Philadelphia, on Filbert Street, when she was two years old.

Kniesche III: So that's where she grew up.

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: Now she's back on Filbert Street again.* [laughs]

Kniesche: Well, anyhow, in 1911, she came over here and we married. We married in San Rafael.

Kniesche III: What kind of service?

Kniesche: Service, my foot! I paid the license and had two witnesses and went home. You don't have to register or anything. You just sign your name, and that's all there is to it, and you swear, and that's all. There are the witnesses, and then you walk out.

Kniesche III: Who were your witnesses, do you remember?

Kniesche: People right there. I never saw them again. That was only--take it or leave it. Cash and carry.

*In San Francisco.

Kniesche III: What about your travels, your trips afterwards up to Aetna Springs and up over to Tamalpais?

Kniesche: Well, that was later on. On Sundays or some days when I'd take a day off, you know. When we worked that time, we worked seven days a week. There was no day off. If you wanted a day off that time, when you worked for wages, you had to quit to take a vacation. That's the only way you could get one.

Kniesche III: You had to quit?

Kniesche: You took a day off, and when you were ready to go to work again, you come in and say, "Here I am," and it's back to work again. That's the way you get a job at that time.

Kniesche III: What about your excursions? Wasn't there a railroad that used to go up to Marin County?

Kniesche: Yes. There were two trains. One went up in the morning, and one came back at night. It went up as far as Santa Rosa, and then back again.

Kniesche III: Wasn't there a train that went up to the top of Tamalpais?

Kniesche: Yes, there was a train up to Mount Tamalpais at that time. They used to call it the "Cockroach Train." It was funny, because you had to make many turns--

Kniesche III: Like a caterpillar?

Kniesche: Yes. We used to hike from Mill Valley. When the train left, we went up the hill, and we beat the train every time. It always went around and 'round and 'round. It was funny. There was one point in the middle--a rest point--where you could get in there, but you could get nothing to drink, because it was a government park, there was no liquor.

Kniesche III: What about the houses you lived in? Where have you lived in San Francisco.

Kniesche: We lived in small hotels first, and then when I had Beth's Cafe, then I bought a home out on Sixteenth Avenue.

Kniesche III: Oh, that was the one you sold before you went to Europe.

Kniesche: Yes, with the cobblestone front. Today that is one of the best houses there in the Sunset.

Kniesche III: What was the address?

Kniesche: 1216 Sixteenth Avenue. There was a foundation at that time they built four feet high--concrete all the way around the garage.

Teiser: When did you buy the house out near the sand dunes on Sixteenth Avenue?

Kniesche: After I was in business. Before, I said, "We're not going to have any children 'til we are in business, because if we have a child now, I'm crucified the rest of my life." I laid everything out the way it should be.

Then when we were in business there, she had a baby. My wife had so much trouble when the baby came. I was standing in front of her bed all night. She says, "Put me out of my misery, I'm dying!" and all things like that. I said to the nurse, "You'd better come in." She said, "She's doing fine." I said, "Like hell she is."

When I went to work that morning, I had the baby. I was all in. I say that every man who's married, when the first born is there, he should stay in front of the bed all night, and see what it is. It will be a different marriage, you know that? Of course, some women, they get it easy.

Teiser: The child you got turned out well.*

Kniesche: I want to tell you something. When he was born (it was in the German Hospital) he was a snow white baby. Not a red baby, a white one. They carried him from one floor to the other. It was a regular show! He was like a dog! All white.

Teiser: He turned out to be a good-looking man.

Kniesche: He had a good-looking mother. [laughs]

Teiser: When was he born?

Kniesche: March 13, 1924.

Teiser: Did your wife work with you in the early years?

Kniesche: Yes. Not with me, but she worked in the restaurant business.

Teiser: What kind of work did she do?

*T.M. Kniesche II, known as "Junior."

Kniesche: She was a dime hatcheck girl.

Teiser: So she saw what went on, and understood your business problems, then?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. I was very busy. Any other way, it wouldn't have been a happy marriage, it wouldn't be like this.

Teiser: Let me ask you about your family. You said you were one of nine. What did your brothers and sisters do? Are they around now?

Kniesche: No, they're all gone.

Teiser: What happened to them? What did they do in life?

Kniesche: I'm not going to brag about myself. I was the go-getter, and my sister who was four years older than I--she was a go-getter. The others--humpty-dumpty.

Teiser: Did some of them come to the United States?

Kniesche: I never invited anybody, because I don't believe in it. You have to come on your own. If they had come on their own, I would have helped them. But to bring them over here, and have them sitting on shoulders--I said no soap. So I never invited them.

Teiser: And none of them came?

Kniesche: Nobody came. If they wanted to go, they knew which way to come.

Teiser: Your sister who was the go-getter--what did she do?

Kniesche: She was a seamstress. My father had an accident in the railroad when they changed the coaches. They crushed one lung. At that time, they didn't know that a person could live with one lung, so tuberculosis set in. He died, and she nursed him, and then she got it and she died. I wasn't there. I was gone then, a long time ago already.

Teiser: So you didn't have any relatives in this country?

Kniesche: Nobody.

Teiser: And you said your wife was living with step-parents in New York, so she didn't have any relatives here either.

Kniesche: Not now. She had nobody, nobody.

Teiser: No obligations?

Kniesche: No sir! Just imagine, if you have nine in the family, and then they get married, when the outlaws get into the in-laws, what a fight that's going to be! Between the religion and the government and the belief--I tell you something!

Teiser: You've never even had any nephews or nieces turn up?

Kniesche: Yes, I had two of them that came over here. One fellow is still alive, and the other one became my chef. He was very good, but many times he'd say, "Why did you get me over here?" I don't know. There's no thanks for anything, except you hand them the whole works.

Teiser: Pretty hard, I would imagine, for a young German to resist coming to work for his American uncle.

Kniesche: Well, I don't know. I had one brother--he was to sea, too. He was a chief steward, and he came from Australia and he worked for me, and I had to let him go. He didn't cut the mustard. Business is business. You can't fool around.

Teiser: To go back--the company you bought at the time of Prohibition, what was the name of it?

Kniesche: Which one?

Teiser: The one you bought when you sold the Elite Restaurant. You bought another company?

Kniesche: Started a company. We made magnasite tiles.

Teiser: What were magnasite tiles used for?

Kniesche: Store fronts. See, you made first the cement blocks, and then you covered them with magnasite.

Teiser: Were they flat tiles, like regular ceramic tiles?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What was so good about magnasite?

Kniesche: It was easier to handle.

Teiser: Do they still make them that way?

Kniesche: I don't think so.

Teiser: That was an entirely different thing for you, wasn't it?

Kniesche: [laughs] Yes, it sure was!

Teiser: How did you happen to think to get into that?

Kniesche: Oh, talk, you know. You want to look for something, and then you get into it. You listen to some jerk. Before you know, you're in.

Teiser: But you started the company?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What was the name of it.

Kniesche: I couldn't tell you honestly, right now. [chuckles] I couldn't tell you. It was such a short time.

Teiser: I suppose it was a small manufacturing business, wasn't it?

Kniesche: Yes, that's what it was.

Teiser: Was it a new process?

Kniesche: New process.

Teiser: How did you know how to do it?

Kniesche: I had a fellow down there who was the brains, and I had the money. Later on, he had some of the money, and I had some of the brains! [laughter] It's the old story.

Teiser: So he was the one who knew the process to make the tiles. I see.

Kniesche: He was always experimenting, experimenting, experimenting. I said to myself, "If he keeps going with experimenting continuously, I'm going to go broke for sure." So I got out.

Teiser: What was his name?

Kniesche: Now you hit me right in the head! [laughs]

Teiser: Maybe you'll think of it later.

Kniesche: Maybe, maybe not.

Teiser: At least you knew enough about business then to know when to get out.

Kniesche: That I knew, for sure. I lost about ten thousand dollars in there.

Teiser: You said you went to Germany then. Did you intend to come back here and go back into the restaurant business?

Kniesche: No. I was going to go to South America, but what I was going to pick up down there, I don't know. I sold my home here, stock, lock, and barrel, furniture and all, to a lady. Then I took a trip to Germany.

I went to Europe, and there was bad times in Germany. They had very little. They were absolutely down to the bottom, just before the inflation started.

Kniesche III: That was the first time you'd seen your parents in all those years?

Kniesche: Yes. I had a house in Stuttgart. I bought it when the mark went down in Germany, I bought that then. It was a brick building with two stores and four apartments in there. It was a good piece of property, and they bombed it all in the second world war. There was nothing left.

Kniesche III: Were you over here in the States, and you bought it from here?

Kniesche: Yes, yes. I bought it. A fellow down there, I knew a guy in Goeppingen, and he bought it then.

Kniesche III: He went and bought it for you?

Kniesche: Yes.

Kniesche III: And they were sending you checks out here?

Kniesche: Yes. Making good money down there, and all at once it was gone. Well, I lost all that because I didn't get nothing for it. I turned it over to somebody to handle it for me, and he stole the rest of it, and I had to pay yet to clean it up. So I got cheated out of everything there!

Kniesche III: This was when you went back there in '21?

Kniesche: Yes.

Buying Schroeder's Cafe

Kniesche: Then in Germany I read in the Sunday newspaper that [Henry] Schroeder died. He died in 1921. I got a paper over there. I said to my wife, "Well, we gonna go back to San Francisco."

Teiser: Did she mind coming back?

Kniesche: No, no, no, no, no.

Teiser: She didn't especially want to go to South America?

Kniesche: No. [laughs] I had the fever.

Teiser: I see. Like coming to San Francisco, same fever?

Kniesche: Yes. So I'm glad I didn't get down there.

Teiser: You still had enough capital left to go into the business, then?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. I didn't go down to rock bottom.

I said to my wife, "See, that's one place that I would like to have. Schroeder's or Herbert's." But Herbert's was too big, and not for sale. When I came [back to San Francisco] the widow [Schroeder's widow] said, "I can't do anything. It's still in probate." I waited. I looked around. I was going to manage a hotel in Salinas, and that fell through. I looked at a lot of different things. Then she [Mrs. Schroeder] was looking for me. I just had enough money to buy the place. I never looked at it--never looked in, never been inside of it. I just knew a fellow who worked there, and he told me about it, and said it look good.

Teiser: You had never seen it before at all?

Kniesche: No. But I knew, with my own ideas, what I could do with it. So in 1922, on the tenth of January, I bought it from Mrs. Schroeder--all in gold pieces.

Teiser: By then you knew restaurant business in San Francisco, all right, didn't you?

Kniesche: Oh, I knew it. I'd seen so much of it then, from all over. I kept my eyes open.

Teiser: And you paid the money before you had looked around the restaurant?

Kniesche: That's right.

Teiser: Before you had walked around in the restaurant?

Kniesche: That's right. [laughter] I knew what Schroeder's could do, and I knew what Herbert's could do. It would be just my line.

Teiser: So you knew what it could do, not necessarily what it was doing?

Kniesche: No, I had my own idea.

Teiser: So in 1922 you bought Schroeder's.

Kniesche: I bought Schroeder's during Prohibition.

Teiser: You couldn't even serve near-beer then, could you?

Kniesche: Yes. Near-beer [3.2 percent alcohol] you served.

Teiser: What did it taste like?

Kniesche: I'd hate to tell you. [laughter]

There's a little funny story. There was a brewmaster from the Acme Brewery who came down all the time, when beer was on the market. He drank beer--imported beer--and said, "Thank you." When he had some friends with him, he would always say, "I like ours the best." I said, "Well, you're crazy. That's all."

So one day, I said to him, "Do you remember there was a beer testing here the other day--" to the Acme brewer I said, "The Acme brewery was second, and the brewery up north was third." He said, "Who won first?" I said, "They send a barrel of horse urine down here, and that got the first prize!" [laughter] He almost killed me! He thought that I would say that Acme won the first prize.

Teiser: You said that you knew that you wanted Schroeder's, but the only other restaurant you thought you might be interested in was Herbert's. What kind of a restaurant was Herbert's?

Kniesche: Well, they were built about the same--for men only. Schroeder's was for men only, and Herbert's was for men only.

Teiser: Where was Herbert's?

Kniesche: Well, he was first on Fillmore Street after the fire. He was on Fillmore Street, and he did a land-office business down there. But Herbert*--he was a good hand-shaker (he should have been a politician), but no businessman. He should have made a big fortune in that business, if he had attended to it the way he should have.

He went in there, and then some fellows give him the idea--they say, "They need you down in Los Angeles." So he went into Los Angeles, and I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars he lost there. He lost that much that he didn't leave enough money for his wife when he died. He should have taken just a certain percentage, but he mortgaged everything, and he lost it all.

Teiser: Didn't they move downtown later?

Kniesche: Yes. He was on Powell Street, between O'Farrell and Ellis, in the middle of the block. The building is still there. Then the business went down, down, down, you know. In Los Angeles it was going bad. Then he let the women in, and that was the finishing touch. [laughter]

Now I had all the same. I had all men. Before the women's lib came out, I said to my boy, "Junior," I says, "You got to do something. We got to get the women in--but how? If we let the women in by ourselves, we'll get crucified." So we stood there and waited and waited. And then all at once, the women's lib came on. They put the pressure on us, and then we fell for it.

I said, "Oh, my God! That's the downfall of Schroeder's!" All the same, I was laughing inside, because I got one day on television, all day long, advertisement. I had it on the radio, all day advertisement. I could never have paid for it, but believe me, everybody sympathized with us--now we're sitting pretty!

It's just like I said to you, I used to be in the right time in the right spot when the right thing happened! [laughter] That happened to me so often, in every one of my dealings I made.

When I took Schroeder's over, it was just a lunch place for men. It was very, very cheaply fixed up. Everything was hunky-bunkly together. I've been in this restaurant business

*There were two brothers, Albert and Conrad, involved in the restaurant. Albert (Al) was the one Mr. Kniesche knew.

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celebration.**

The Management

Kniesche: all my life--not in the business, but working in there--and I knew what it needed. I fixed it up and set it up. I made a wonderful place out of it.

Then the [1939] Exposition came over here on Treasure Island. When that came in--I was made!

Teiser: When you were willing to put money in a restaurant, what kind of restaurant did that have to be?

Kniesche: Like my own style.

Teiser: What style was that?

Kniesche: German-style.

Teiser: Did it have to have a lot of people coming there?

Kniesche: I worked in the Luchow's too, on Fourteenth Street. That was a German place--old-time German place in New York. I build it exactly like that here. There was no pictures on the walls. The walls were bare. They were whitewashed. When I came in down there, I changed the walls to give it a marbled effect. Then later on, a fellow came to me and said, "I'm going to paint you something; the pictures are very cheap." He was hungry, and he couldn't get any work, and I said, "Go ahead."

Believe me, those pictures today [would] cost a fortune! They're all oil painting on canvas! When you look at them every eye has a meaning. What very few painters can paint is eyes. This fellow, when you see anything that has an eye, every eye has a meaning what's in the picture! If you have to look at something, look at them. It's very interesting.

They're wonderful, I'll tell you, those pictures.* And so on, and a little knick-knack here, and a knick-knack there [were added] that I got from the merchants.** I was liked! I go in the bank today, and I'm liked by every one of them. Because I always got a smile, I always wish them a good opening in the morning. It must be my good personality.

Teiser: You say that Schroeder had established the cafe in 1893?

*For further description of Schroeder's present decor, see pp. 85 and 150-154.

**See p. 87.

- Kniesche: Yes. When I took over, believe me, little by little I changed everything along. I had to get rid of the cook. I had to get rid of the cashier. They all got the fat of the land up there [before], and they took what they had been given. With me, it was different. I put a system in there. That's the book of law.
- Teiser: Your wife was willing that you buy it, I presume?
- Kniesche: Oh yes. That's the luckiest thing that ever happened in my life--my sweetheart.
- Teiser: She let you buy the restaurant that you wanted! [laughter] Good for her!
- Kniesche: She lets me do anything that I want--within reason. [laughter] Let me tell you something--she was a good helper.
- Teiser: Is she a good businesswoman?
- Kniesche: And how! I'm a little easy-going. She's sharp. She bought the properties.
- Teiser: That's one thing that's good to have in San Francisco.
- Kniesche: Yes. You see the prices now? My God! Everybody's a millionaire!
- Teiser: You'd have to be to buy real estate now.
- Kniesche: I was looking around, looking around. All at once, she [Mrs. Schroeder] says, "I've been looking high and low for you!"
- Kniesche III: She said to you?
- Kniesche: Yes. She sold me the business. I paid \$6500 for it, cash. That almost finished me, with my high finances. [laughs] I was almost through. Well, I got in there--
- Kniesche III: So you mean you came back here from Germany, and you read about it in Germany--
- Kniesche: In the newspaper.
- Kniesche III: --and you came back here, and then you found that you couldn't buy it for a while.
- Kniesche: No.

Kniesche III: And you were looking around at that point.

Kniesche: I was looking all over.

Kniesche III: Because at first, you didn't think you could buy it?
And she came and sought you out?

Kniesche: Yes. But it was a shell. There was nothing there. I want to tell you something. It used to be just a saloon with a free lunch counter, and they had about three entrees there at that time. Very, very dilapidated. He [Schroeder] was no restaurant man. He never was in the restaurant business, except shooting deers and ducks--great hunter.

Kniesche III: Had you ever met Schroeder?

Kniesche: No, I never was in the place.

Kniesche III: Then how did you happen to know that you wanted it?

Kniesche: You know that waiter on the picture there? Otto?* He used to come out to the house all the time. He had the key. He would come in and go as he pleased. He would tend to the garden and everything else like that, wash the car, etcetera. He belonged to the family. There was no Junior yet.

Kniesche III: You heard about Schroeder's through him?

Kniesche: Yes, he told us. He worked there.

Kniesche III: I see.

Kniesche: He worked there at lunch. When I bought it, I asked him. I said, "Otto, you want to come in with me, half and half?" He said, "No." He was after the tips, too. He says, "If you want some money, I can lend you some money," which he did. I think I borrowed two thousand dollars from him. Then I went to work, and what a job I had there to get started! It was so mis-managed it wasn't even funny.

The cook had his free will, the cashier had his own way, and they were stealing all over. The cashier gave Schroeder what he thought he should have. The rest was all his. Anyhow, I had to change the whole system. I talked to the cook. He says, "You know, everybody likes my cooking. I'm just here

*Otto Gieselmann. See pp. 158-159 and 160.

Kniesche: to please the customer." In other words, I could jump in the river for his part. I said to myself, "Brother, when the time is right and I'm ready, you're gonna get the hook!"

Kniesche III: Where was Schroeder's located at the time you bought it? 111 Front Street?

Kniesche: Yes. I looked around then for a cook, and I had one in mind--Julius. He worked for Beth's Cafe, and he came with me. So I had him on the line. The other guy, one day he cut his finger, I said to him, "Boy, I can't get no extra men here. If you want to keep your job, you got to get a man in your place. I can get a steady man, but I can't get no extra man." So when I said "get a steady man," he said, "Take him!" He was so sure that nobody could do his job. When he said, "Take him!" I says, "I got him." [laughter]

Well, that guy was out, and I had it my own way. Then I said, "I want it this way, and I want it this way, and I want to have it this way," because I knew what I was talking about. From then on, the business got better.

Then the cashier--the guy that took in the cash behind the bar--he stole. If I close up one hole, he opened another one. He was always tricky, you know. So finally I caught him red-handed. I told him, and said so-and-so. He come to me, and he says, "If I gave my word of honor that I won't do it again, will you keep me?" I said, "No, you have no honor, and I don't want to keep you." So he went.

The next morning, I went behind the bar and did the cashier. And every customer says, "Where's Chris?" and I said, "Chris retired." And every one of them told me, "You sure lost a good honest man!" I stood there with fire in my eyes--I could have killed everybody--and I said, "Yes, we sure did." Because that guy was six foot four, and I was five foot five, and if I had condemned that cashier, I would have cut my own throat. So I always sympathized, and I said, "Oh, yes. Oh, yes."

Then they said, "I wonder why Chris never comes down, never see him?" Years afterward, when I got more acquainted with the customers, I told them the story, and they said, "I wouldn't believe it!" And I said, "I know. Nobody would have believed it. That's the reason that I didn't tell anybody, but I tell you now because you know me now, and I tell you now that he was the biggest crook Schroeder had." They wouldn't believe it.

Kniesche: Then I had my own way, from then on. I really built it up, renovated it, and fixed it up, improved it. I tell you--there was nothing there. There was nothing there. She never could have got that much money from anybody, and I bought it because I liked it.

Teiser: Had Schroeder's been serving all German food when you bought it?

Kniesche: Yes, but very little of it. It was mostly a merchant lunch. There was about three entrees, and that was all. Mostly they attended to the bar business.

Teiser: Was it open in the evenings?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: Just a lunch place, then. Did it draw from the produce district?

Kniesche: Yes, but I really didn't depend on the produce men. A lot of sea captains came, a lot of shipping men at that time, because the piers were crowded. Now we have empty piers--not one ship in the harbor.

Teiser: The customhouse was near.

Kniesche: Yes, the old customhouse was there on Battery Street. It was close to the harbor down there, near the waterfront.

Teiser: You said that you paid Mrs. Schroeder all in gold coin?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What did you do, go to the bank and get it?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Is that the way people did business then?

Kniesche: That's right.

Teiser: Must have been a job to carry it.

Kniesche: I carry it now from the bank when I get change. [laughs]

Teiser: You paid her the whole sum at once? You bought it outright? Everything?

- Kniesche: Yes, everything was finished. She had the money and I had the property. [laughter]
- Teiser: What did it look like when you walked into it?
- Kniesche: Well, just like a plain saloon, except a little bigger.
- Teiser: How long was the bar?
- Kniesche: The bar was about twenty-five chairs, and then in the back you could seat about a hundred people.
- Teiser: So it wasn't so small. Had it been at that location very long?
- Kniesche: Before that, I think ten years before. That was right after the fire. The fire was 1906, and then he moved down there to Front Street. Then he moved a couple times on Front Street, getting a little bigger all the time.
- Teiser: So it was a growing business?
- Kniesche: That I can't say.
- Teiser: When you fired the cook you inherited with the business and hired a new one, you said things got better.
- Kniesche: Then we cooked my way, not his way no more. Then it improved the business, because I knew what he was doing. He was absolutely just doing things for himself, not for the house.
- Teiser: Like what?
- Kniesche: He [the old cook] would put a big potful of water at three o'clock, and turned the gas on, and when he came to work at six o'clock the next morning the water was boiling. Then he would take the meat, and put the meat in boiling water. When he put the meat in there, everything was tough, because the shock of the heat on the meat made the meat tough.
- Every time the customer would order they'd say, "If the boiled beef is tender, I take boiled beef. If the corned beef is tender, I take corned beef." But everything was tough. See, he wasn't smart enough. If he would have put the pots on, and put the meat in the pots with cold water with a very small fire under it and let it boil slowly, he would have the most beautiful meat in the world! That's the difference.
- Teiser: He was doing it so he wouldn't have to get there so early in the morning?

Kniesche: I guess it was something like that. But that was the only way that he knew. We just did it the opposite way, the way it should be done. After that, there was no more asking if it was tender, because it was tender. It had to be tender. You'd never get any tough meat. Then I got some good waiters, and then I made improvements in the place.

Schroeder himself didn't know nothing about the restaurant business. He was a good front man, standing on the door and talking with this fellow and that fellow. But he didn't know nothing about the restaurant business.

Teiser: The bartender--did they buy drinks on the house for favorite customers, ordinarily? Did the bartender do that?

Kniesche: Sometimes, yes.

Teiser: And you had to trust him to know when?

Kniesche: Well, listen, I could turn around and I wouldn't know if they did or they didn't.

Teiser: Isn't that part of being a good bartender even now?

Kniesche: Yes, it is. If you don't watch out, they give the house away, just so he gets a tip.

Teiser: On the other hand, it's a good idea to buy a drink once in a while for a customer?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. You do that anyhow.

Teiser: Now do you do it?

Kniesche: Once in a while, if we have a good party there, and I'm at the bar. But I make no habit out of it. Ours is just strictly a business.

Teiser: Does the cook have a hand in ordering the food?

Kniesche: The merchandise? No. Not with me. He did before, with Schroeder, but not with me. Everything came from me in the office, not down there in the kitchen. I was absolutely strong against it.

Teiser: When they made a delivery, they checked with you?

Kniesche: Yes. I checked and I ordered it.

Teiser: And you went down and inspected it?

Kniesche: Some days, sure. There was no more monkey business.

Teiser: What kind of waiters did you have, and what kind did you get?

Kinesche: Well, at that time, they were all old-timers. I tell you something--they were German, French, Italian. That was the mainstay, years ago. Then you had the German places, you had the French places, you had the Italian places.

Teiser: But the waiters you had working there. What was the matter with them?

Kniesche: [laughs] Well, like everything else--when they had someone that they could give things away on the house, they give them a ticket less. My expenses would be so high I couldn't stand it.

Teiser: You have to trust the waiters.

Kniesche: Trust them, yes.

Teiser: Who puts the food on the plate?

Kniesche: The cook stands by there, and he cuts it and puts it on the plate, with the vegetables and the potatoes. The cook does all that.

Teiser: The waiter does--?

Kniesche: No, no. He just carries it away.

Teiser: So that's no part of his judgment?

Kniesche: No. But he can give you this or give you that, and you have no control over it.

Teiser: And not write it up, you mean?

Kniesche: No. And if he does write it up, it takes too long, you never wait on anybody.

Teiser: So there's a good deal of skill to it, as well as honesty?

Kniesche: You got to have a system.

Teiser: A waiter has to have a feeling for when people want their order, and how long they'll wait, and all that, doesn't he?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. He's a salesman, like anything else.

Teiser: I know that sometimes people want to take a long time to order.

Kniesche: They take their time. They have to sit by and have their drink and then they order later on. They do that now.

Teiser: And sometimes people want to order right away.

Kniesche: Some of them, they want to get their check before they eat it. [laughter]

Teiser: So a waiter has to know all that.

Kniesche: He gets it.

Teiser: Do you keep an eye on them?

Kniesche: Well, when I go through I see if something is wrong.

Teiser: So you replaced the people Schroeder had. How many people did you have in the kitchen?

Kniesche: I had the cook and the assistant, and a dishwaher, when I started. I had six waiters and a bartender and a cashier.

Teiser: You had a big payroll!

Kniesche: For the place, yes. But you didn't get much, and they didn't get much. You know, a lunch was fifty cents with a stein of beer.

Making Improvements

Kniesche: I had my own idea of what I wanted to do. Then I turned it over, and little by little I did the changes. I saw where I worked what was good and what was no good.

Teiser: At that time, did you pay daily?

Kniesche: No, weekly. When the bills came in weekly, they were paid.

Teiser: How about the beer people and the wine people?

Kniesche: It was Prohibition, and there was no beer, there was no wine, there was no nothing.

Teiser: Except for near-beer!

Kniesche: Just near-beer.

Teiser: Who made the near-beer that you got?

Kniesche: I think it was Acme beer.

Teiser: Did you have it on draft?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: How did it taste?

Kniesche: It was lousy.

Teiser: Then really, your bar was--

Kniesche: The bar was nil. It was nothing. The business was poor.

Teiser: Could people sit at the bar and just drink near-beer?

Kniesche: Not very often, because they'd get sick and tired of it. They all would go some place where they could get home brew. They made their own beer. I didn't bother with that.

Teiser: You didn't sell any bootleg whiskey or anything?

Kniesche: No sir!

Teiser: You didn't?

Kniesche: No sir! That's why I never got in trouble. When the policemen came around, they thought I was bootlegging--"that little shrimp, we can't catch him!" But I didn't bootleg at all, because I didn't care. I did my business. I made a little profit, and it made me a living and that's all. I said, "I'm waiting for the time to come, because this thing will not work out."

Teiser: You had to wait quite a while--eleven years! But meanwhile, you were building up the place.

Kniesche: Yes, remodeling as much as I could do.

Teiser: Did many of the old restaurants in the city continue serving liquor illegally through Prohibition?

Kniesche: Well, you heard about Marquard [Harry Marquard's Marquard Cafe].

- Teiser: Yes.
- Kniesche: He got in trouble. Then in the Palace Hotel, I know that some of the waiters handled it in the Palace Hotel. But I stayed clear of it.
- Teiser: All the places in the North Beach served liquor.
- Kniesche: Yes, they served it. Otherwise, they couldn't exist. It was the craziest thing to do!
- Teiser: There were a lot of cafeterias in San Francisco, weren't there?
- Kniesche: Oh, yes.
- Kniesche: What was that fellow down there? I think it was Clinton, who had all kinds of things. He was doing good by himself when somebody put in his head, "Why don't you make a corporation out of it?" and he said, "I'll start."
- Before that, every employee had an interest in the business. When they sold the stocks, then they had no money interest in the business, and then they went broke. He had a good thing, and he threw it away.
- Teiser: Back to the end of Prohibition--
- Kniesche: Believe me, when beer came back and the Exposition was here--the Exposition in the bay--then the business started. First came the beer, then came the liquor back, the wine next. In the meantime, we [had] ruined the whole industry. In fact, back then we had better wine than they had in Europe at that time. When they started Prohibition, then it was dago red and dago white. All the experiments and all the improvements went out the window.
- Teiser: How about beer?
- Kniesche: The beer, the three-percent beer then--it was like dishwater.
- Teiser: What about the bootleg beer?
- Kniesche: It was different, it was stronger. But I didn't handle that either, because it wasn't worthwhile.
- Teiser: You could have made it at home for your own use.
- Kniesche: Yes, [laughs] and have a million flies around!

Teiser: How many people could Schroeder's seat when you bought it?

Kniesche: About 140.

Teiser: Did you gradually increase that?

Kniesche: Twenty years ago [in 1956], we moved and got our own building and we made it a little bigger. We seat 250. We moved to across the street [to 240 Front Street].

Teiser: Did you ever increase the seating capacity at 111 Front?

Kniesche: I couldn't. There was no room. It was one row of tables, one side of the bar, and in the back was the kitchen. Now we have three rows of tables and the bar and the kitchen. In the back there is a kind of a banquet hall.

Teiser: When did you add the murals?

Kniesche: When we had the Exposition over on Treasure Island. Before that, he [the artist] came from Hamburg.

Teiser: What was his name?

Kniesche: [Herman] Richter. [Spells it] He really was an artist.

Teiser: And he came to you and suggested it?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Did you see drawings of what it was going to be?

Kniesche: No. I tell you, he had good ideas.

Teiser: Did he show you anything that he painted before?

Kniesche: No. On the spur of the moment everything came.

Teiser: He just walked in to the restaurant?

Kniesche: Yes. He painted the picture in the brewery,* a couple of pictures, and then he came down here and said, "Do you want me to paint something?" Well, I didn't care, because the walls they were plain. I only saw one picture down there, and he just kept a-going. He did most of them for food and drinks. Today they are highly insured, because they are all oil paintings.

Teiser: It was lucky, when you moved, that they were, so you could move them. How long did it take him to do them?

*Lucky Lager Brewery. See p. 163.

Kniesche: Oh, it all depended on how this artist feels. If they feel good, they make headway. If they don't feel good, you can't coax them.

Teiser: Was it over a period of a year or something?

Kniesche: Yes, it took him about a year.

Teiser: Would he work while people were eating.

Kniesche: No, no.

Teiser: Were the customers interested, though, as more things appeared?

Kniesche: Yes, of course they get interested. Most of the people who saw them, they are all dead now.

Teiser: And he got lots of food and drink?

Kniesche: Yes. He got some money, but it was a pittance what he got. But he made his own deal.

Teiser: He probably liked your cooking.

Kniesche: Oh, he liked it all right, sure.

Teiser: Did he stay here in San Francisco for long?

Kniesche: Yes. He went to the fair, and he painted people at the fair, but it didn't go over. He couldn't make just sketches and things. He was a painter.

Teiser: Then what happened to him?

Kniesche: I don't know what happened to him afterwards. I guess he drifted some other place.

Teiser: Were there any other artists around who did some work for you?

Kniesche: I tell you, when we moved, we were short by three pictures. I had a Russian paint them. They cost me more than the whole bunch of original ones put together. No comparison.

Teiser: Who was that painter?

Kniesche: Donat Ivanovsky. Someone from San Francisco. But his eyes have no expression. The other fellow, the eyes were mellow. You could read his mind through the eyes. Oh, he was a wonderful artist, that guy.

Teiser: Then you got quite a nice atmosphere with those in the restaurant?

Kniesche: Yes. Then I got those plaques made from all the states and from Europe, for decoration. It really improved the place. I got a lot of mirrors and stuff from the merchants,* which they donated. I got some beautiful steins right there. They're priceless right now.

Teiser: Where did you get them?

Kniesche: From friends. It's a good atmosphere.

Teiser: You have wood paneling.

Kniesche: I tell you, it would cost a fortune today if you would rebuild it.

Teiser: Yes. And the bar, you said, is solid.

Kniesche: Yes. When we moved over from the other place down there, we built a new bar. The fellow we had to build a new one said, "What are you doing there? You're not building a bar, you're building a battleship!" [laughter] I said, "Yes." But, when they throw the dice, you cannot hear the dice clicking. [bangs on table] It's solid, it's not hollow. In everything, we took the best, because the labor was the same.**

Teiser: How long is the bar?

Kniesche: You can seat twenty people there.

Teiser: Do people eat lunch at the bar?

Kniesche: No. If I started that, they would all sit at the bar, and then nobody would get there to drink. You have a dining room, so we don't serve any meals at the bar.

Teiser: When did they start putting seats at bars? People used to stand at bars. When did that change?

Kniesche: I can't tell you that now, because it came gradually. I think when beer came back.

*restaurant suppliers

**The back bar is made out of rose wood and came on a sailing ship around the Cape of Good Hope in the late 1800s. TMK II

Teiser: At the Nurnberg, you had a bar. You didn't have chairs there, did you?

Kniesche: No, we didn't have no chairs there.

Teiser: Did you have spittoons?

Kniesche: Yes. And towels hanging under the bar. It was all unsanitary. We did away with all of it.

Teiser: Did you have a free lunch at the bar at the Nurnberg?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What did you serve?

Kniesche: We had roast beef. We had ham and cold cuts. We had a nice lunch.

Teiser: Bread?

Kniesche: Yes. It really was nice, that free lunch. It all disappeared afterwards.

Teiser: Schroeder's, when you took it over, had it no longer?

Kniesche: No, during the Prohibition there was no free lunch. It was done away with.

Teiser: And since?

Kniesche: Since I haven't done it either.

Teiser: When Repeal came, by that time you had a good business in dining?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Both at lunch and dinner?

Kniesche: No, we had just lunch. So long as we had no women, I wasn't open for dinner. Then in February, 1935, we started in and let the ladies in at night.

Teiser: Yes, I went to your old place. I can remember that.

Kniesche: But not for lunch.

Teiser: No, at night.

Kniesche: We changed for lunch when we had the lib movement. [laughs] When the women's lib made us do that in October, 1970. They made us do that because the movement came out. And believe me--the women get just as much money as the men for the job, and they didn't have to depend on the men no more to take them out. So they started by themselves. Believe me, it helped the business considerable!*

Teiser: Before that your customers had been sea people--the captains and so forth--and who else?

Kniesche: Business people, brokers, insurance men, bankers and so forth and so on.

Teiser: Did they eat good big lunches?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. Then they'd sit there and shake dice and shake for their drinks and so forth. They entertained themselves. That's no more. Right now, you come to work. You go out for lunch, you come back from lunch, and you go home. At that time, people were free and easy. They had more time. That's all done away with.

Teiser: Did they eat bigger lunches?

Kniesche: Well, some of them did and some of them didn't.

Teiser: Did you have more German people than others?

Kniesche: Yes and no. It was a cosmopolitan town.

Teiser: How about at dinnertime? Did more German people come at dinner?

Kniesche: Yes. Most of the time, people who had German parents, and then the children would come after they were grown up. We still have that today.

Kinds of Food

Teiser: The German restaurants had never, in your time, been catering to Germans exclusively?

*See also p. 74.

Kniesche: No, but they had German food. Everybody came in. Same thing with the Italian place. Same thing with the French place. When you get tired of German cooking, you have French cooking. It was the same story.

Teiser: Did San Francisco have good German cooking?

Kniesche: At one time, we had more German restaurants here than any other restaurants, and all the big ones.

Teiser: Was the quality good?

Kniesche: Yes. It was wholesome. You had no heartburns afterwards.

Teiser: Where did you get your pastry?

Kniesche: We get them from Fantasia [now]. We have a recipe to make the huckleberry squares that's our recipe. They can't sell that. We buy it from them.

Teiser: Before Fantasia opened, where did you get them?

Kniesche: I got them from the California Bakery and when they didn't bake it no more, then I went to another hotel, and they made it. We always had our own recipes.

Teiser: Have you always had just a few desserts?

Kniesche: Yes. Huckleberry squares, cheesecake, and we had some pies.

Teiser: How does that compare with what Schroeder served?

Kniesche: I think he had pies, but he didn't serve huckleberry squares and cheesecake.

Teiser: That was your idea. How did you develop your own recipe?

Kniesche: From experience from years before.

Teiser: You don't cook, do you?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: But you know how to tell other people to cook?

Kniesche: I know what should be, and the way it should taste. I'll tell them right there. Many times I'll come in the kitchen and say, "Put a little more chicken broth in that thing. It's getting too thick." Why don't they do it by themselves? Because they haven't got enough sense to think for themselves .

Teiser: Or they wouldn't be cooks. They'd be managers.

Kniesche: I don't believe in it--if you know how to cook, and you get hotheaded, you fire the chef and go in there and cook yourself. I believe the owner should stay down there where the money comes in, not where the work is. Let the other fellow do it. Hire somebody to do that work. But it's getting tougher from day to day. Nobody learns the business no more. You can't get no more good cooks. But we still cook like we cooked sixty years ago.

Teiser: Do you ever change your recipes?

Kniesche: When you get something what's good, and the people like it, we stay with it.

Teiser: Do you tell the chefs how to fix new things?

Kniesche: We find out what it is and the way it's done.

Teiser: When they make something new, do they make it and you taste it until they get it right?

Kniesche: Until they get it right, yes.

Teiser: So you have to have a cook that will go along with you?

Kniesche: Yes. Otherwise, you can't take anybody who doesn't know anything. The main thing is--and this is the toughest thing in cooking--is the gravies. If you can't make a good gravy, you can't make good food.

Teiser: How do you learn to make a good gravy?

Kniesche: You got to have the bones. You got to put the vegetables in there, and they have to cook for hours and hours and hours to get all the good out of it. If you make it short, then you get heartburn.

Teiser: Have you changed the kind of things you serve much?

Kniesche: Well, I tell you something, I have some bill of fares which I wrote in the Heidelberg when I came to San Francisco. I have that hanging on the wall down there in the restaurant. We had the same kind of food then that we have today. The hamburger was the hamburger, and the wienerschnitzel was the wienerschnitzel, and the pot roast was the pot roast.

Teiser: Same thing?

Kniesche: Same thing.

Teiser: Nothing's off the menu? Not sausages, or--?

Kniesche: Well, certain things went off the menu, like wild duck and wild goose. All of those things went off, the things which didn't sell no more. For instance, striped bass you couldn't sell no more in a restaurant. They took a lot of stuff away which you can't do no more, and they made a law out of it. Deer meat you can't sell.*

[interruption]

Teiser: You were just saying that...

Kniesche: ...you can't cook small. Only chops, steaks, chicken you can make small portions. When you want roast beef or lamb, you've got to have a large piece of meat. Boiled beef, and so on.

Teiser: So your recipes don't do a home cook any good?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: Don't all the big cuts go to restaurants?

Kniesche: Oh, they can get any meat they want. But what are they going to do about it?

Teiser: Serve a hundred people! [laughter]

Kniesche: You've got to get at least three, four ribs to roast the roast beef to get medium and rare and well-done. You couldn't try to take a piece of roast beef that thick and roast it. You'd have a steak, but you wouldn't have no roast beef.

Teiser: Do you age your own meat?

Kniesche: Yes. When we have sauerbraten--sauerbraten with potato pancakes, which is our biggest seller--we marinate the meat. We have these vats downstairs where we marinate the meat. That goes over big.

Teiser: You have a big aging and storage room, do you?

Kinesche: We have the whole basement. We got refrigerators and iceboxes. I tell you, we really have an institution down there.**

*See also p. 105.

**See pp. 150-153.

Teiser: You have to marinate a big piece of meat for many days, I suppose.

Kniesche: About three or four days.

Teiser: So you always have to keep planning ahead?

Kniesche: We have it on Tuesdays and Fridays--that's all. We have plenty of time in between.

Teiser: You have pretty much the same menu every week?

Kniesche: Just about, yes. Once in a while we change something. But it's a weekly bill of fare, with every day different in the week. But during the whole week, it's almost the same, because we have on certain days certain things that we've had for years and years. I remember.

Teiser: You try to use everything up, don't you?

Kniesche: You've got to have a happy medium. Some days you run out, and other days, you have it over. You've got to balance it. Some of them you can add to from lunch to dinner.

Teiser: If you have some meat left over that's not served one day, can you use it in a soup stock or something?

Kniesche: No. You can sell it cold. If you make soup out of it, there's no life in it after it's cooked once. You can't get nothing out of it except the piece of meat what you put in there. It wouldn't be no good, making a soup.

Teiser: How does your menu go?

Kniesche: We have two or three main entrees, then we have sausages, frankfurters, meat dumplings, hamburgers, and so forth. Then we have, for instance, on Mondays, [beef] tongue and spinach, and Wiener Roast Braten. Tuesdays we have corned beef and cabbage. Wednesday we have smoked beef. Thursdays we have boiled beef, and Fridays we have the sauerbraten and pig's knuckles.

Teiser: And you're not open Saturday or Sunday?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: Tuesday you have Irish stew?

Kniesche: Yes. We have either Irish stew or lamb curry and rice.

Kniesche: One week we have Irish stew, the next week we have lamb curry. We change off certain things.

Teiser: Do you have a lot of people who eat there regularly?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Every day?

Kniesche: Yes. [laughs] Me, myself, and I. [laughter]

Teiser: Do a lot of people come twice a week?

Kniesche: Yes, some of them. Some of them come three, four times a week and they sit together. They know each other.

Teiser: Now, I suppose, you get a lot of financial district people.

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Location, Tips and Diners

Teiser: The neighborhood certainly has changed.

Kniesche: Well, I tell you something. When we first moved in there, the produce market was getting kind of scared.* Right now, we are in the center of the new development, because the business moves away from Montgomery Street, and it's coming right now on Front Street. On Front they have the high-rises there, and the Golden Gate [Gateway] buildings that they built--Embarcadero Center. It has four big buildings going up now. And we are right in the middle. Now, across the street is the Western Women's Bank, going into business there.

Teiser: Well, you'll get a lot more women.

Kniesche: Right.

Teiser: Women don't eat as large meals as men, do they?

Kniesche: Well, you'd be surprised. They do more drinking! [laughs]

*It was subsequently moved and the area redeveloped.

Teiser: Is that right?!

Kniesche: Right you are.

Teiser: So their bills are just as high?

Kniesche: Sure. They are making just as much money as a man makes now. There's no difference.

Teiser: You moved to your present location at the time that the city Redevelopment Agency condemned everything down there, is that it?

Kniesche: Before.

Teiser: Was it difficult for business then?

Kniesche: No. I tell you something. When I started the move, the business was starting to move our way. So we came over on the other side of California Street, and I said to my boy, "Come on, let's go. There's something stirring down here." And then we bought a building in that location. We built the restaurant on the ground floor and when it was finished we moved over the weekend. We didn't miss one day!

We set the opening date when we started, and we were finished a week before! A week before, the place was all ready to go. We moved in that day, and we didn't miss one day. We closed the other one on Friday night and opened up on Monday.

Teiser: Did the Redevelopment Agency buy the other building that you were in before?

Kniesche: Well, they put a high-rise there.

Teiser: It wasn't part of the city redevelopment?

Kniesche: No, but they set the price.

Teiser: But even with all those changes, your business didn't fall off?

Kniesche: I improved the business. I wish I still had the business that I had the first six months there. It was just like a stream, going and coming continuously. Then competition started in. At one time, there was just three restaurants in that neighborhood.

Teiser: What were the other two?

- Kniesche: Well, there was the Tadich [Grill] there. There was one other. They went out of business afterwards. They lasted so long, and then they went out of business.
- Teiser: Now you have another restaurant next to you, and another one next to that.
- Kniesche: There are so many, I bet you within four blocks you can count almost a hundred restaurants.
- Teiser: Some of them are serve-yourself cafeterias and sandwich shops--
- Kniesche: --and soup places. When they put up a building, all they advertise is the restaurant. There are so many restaurants already that one eats the other up! It's no good.
- Teiser: Are many of them open for dinner, as you are?
- Kniesche: Yes. They are all open, you know.
- Teiser: Not the sandwich shops. They close up.
- Kniesche: Well, some of them do. Some of them keep open.
- Teiser: There's a theory that if a lot of businesses of one kind cluster together, they all do better.
- Kniesche: It depends on how many. You can overdo it, like anything else.
- Teiser: Have some of them gone out of business since you've been there?
- Kniesche: Oh, yes. They find that they cannot make it. Especially when they don't keep the house in order. They don't pay their bills. They spend the money, things like that. All at once, the business gets slack and they all owe the butcher, they all owe the baker. Then they get in trouble.
- Teiser: In the daytime, you have the business people from around the restaurant area. In the evening, do people come from all over the city?
- Kniesche: Yes, they come from Oakland and all over, from Marin and so forth and so on. And we get other people from back East.
- Teiser: Yes. I noticed, when we were there the other night, that there were some tourists there.

Kniesche: Oh yes, we get lots of tourists.

Teiser: How do they know about you?

Kniesche: Last Christmas we sent out 13,000 Christmas cards. I started that. When you eat here, you can sign your name, and you get a Christmas card. That snowballed--it got bigger and bigger! We have a mailing list now that's worth a fortune! That started out little, and by God, it developed into a snowball. They go all over the United States, to Australia, and all over the world. If you put your name on that card, you get a Christmas card every Christmas--and always something new.

The people come all during the year, and they says, "Thanks for the Christmas card!" People come from out of town, and then they get a Christmas card, and when somebody goes to San Francisco, they say, because of the Schroeder's advertisement, "Go to Schroeder's!" You see? Believe me, that pays off, but it's a lot of work. You have to keep it all alphabetically.

Teiser: What kind of cards are they?

Kniesche: I'll bring some of them along next time you come here.

Teiser: Good!

Kniesche: It's an expensive thing, because you have to take the picture and you have to mail it, and then they move--years ago, at the post office, they would follow it up, but now they bring it back to the sender. Then you have to re-mail it again. It's a lot of work.

Teiser: You have photographs, mostly?

Kniesche: It's a photograph [in the restaurant].*

Teiser: I brought along a couple of old restaurant postcards. One's from a Cafe Odeon and one from the Louvre.

Kniesche: The Paris Louvre.

Teiser: A lot of restaurants used to have those.

*See pp. 107-109, 112.

- Kniesche: We have cards too, from the restaurant. We have a lot of different things, in the pictures. Now we have postcards with the picture [of the mural decorations], and anybody who wants to take them along from the bar, they can help themselves.
- Teiser: Restaurants used to mail them for you. You could write a card--
- Kniesche: We do that yet. You sign it, and then we mail it.
- Teiser: Was the Odeon a good restaurant?
- Kniesche: Oh, yes. [Adolph] Becker was the president. Then he took over the Bismarck Cafe, when the Bismarck Cafe went broke.
- Teiser: What was the Odeon? Was that German?
- Kniesche: The Odeon was a German place.
- Teiser: The Paris Louvre clearly wasn't.
- Kniesche: [Morris] Meyerfeld was the president [of the Paris Louvre]. It was on Eddy and Powell Street.
- Teiser: Was that a good restaurant?
- Kniesche: Yes.
- Teiser: Was it expensive?
- Kniesche: Expensive? [laughs] There was no expensive places. Beer was ten cents. Whiskey was fifteen cents, and an entree was about fifty cents.
- Teiser: When you were a waiter, you made how much?
- Kniesche: Oh, it all depends. [laughs] Twenty-five dollars a month. The tips, at that time--at that time, the restaurants out here didn't believe in them. The tipping came after the first world war, when they went to Europe. They'd get so much for the dollar that the soldiers were absolutely crazy. They didn't know how to throw their money away. When they came back, they brought the tipping with them.
- Teiser: Were you glad when tipping came here?
- Kniesche: [laughs] Either way, it doesn't make much difference. Now they expect fifteen percent of the bill, which I think is crazy. I believe to pay the man on the service he has given. They don't do that any more. They pay them service or no service--and they overpay.

Max
Mrs.
Max Jr.



Seasons Greetings, 1956

*M*ay Your Heart Be Light...
and Your Home Be Bright
...as we wish for you all the joys
of a Happy Holiday Season

SCHROEDER'S CAFE
240 FRONT STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
Since 1893

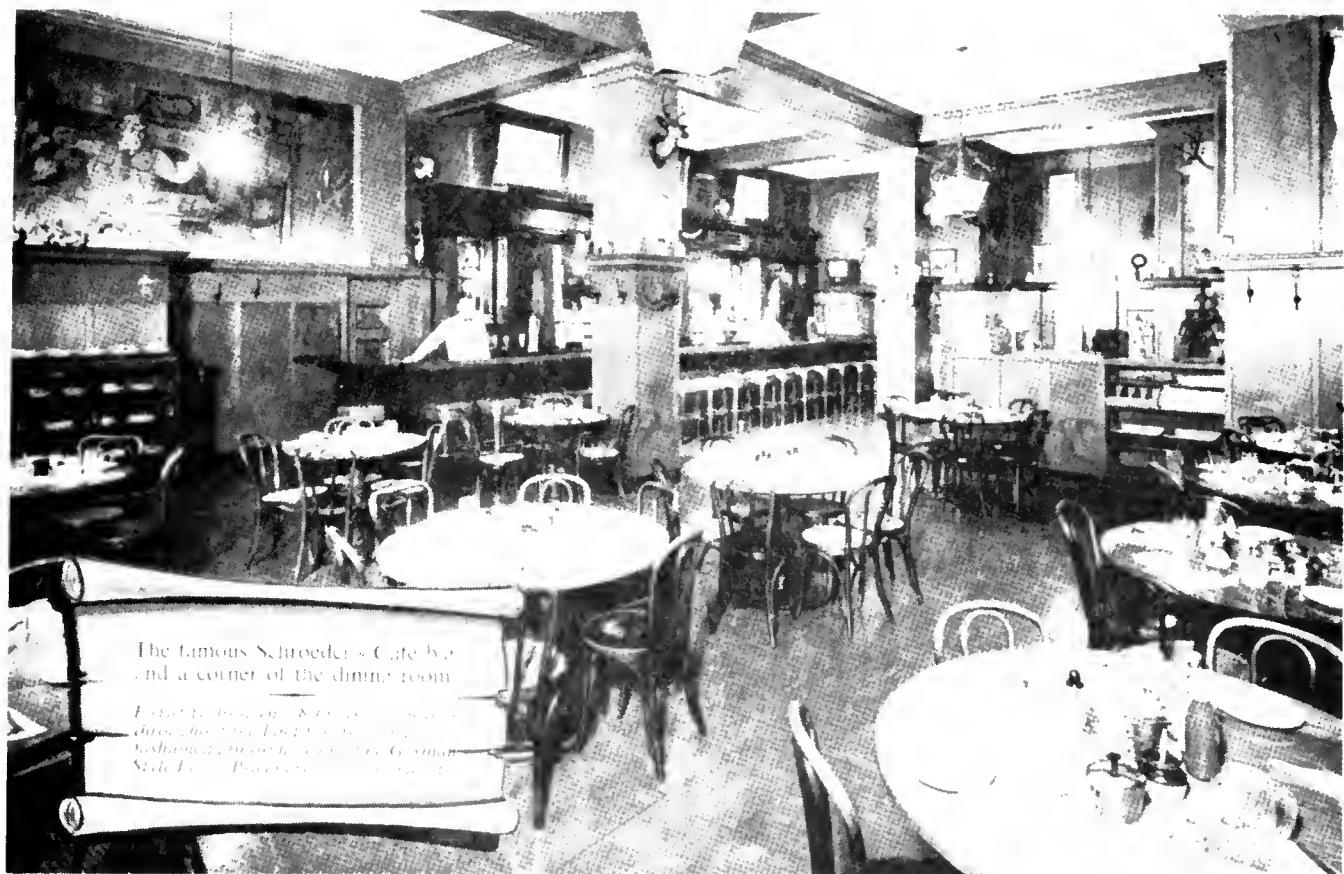




Christmas Greetings, 1967



Christmas Greetings, 1968



Christmas Greetings, 1958



Christmas Greetings, 1969

Teiser: Has anyone ever tried a restaurant that said, "No tipping"?

Kriesche: Well, you would have to pay the men more than union scale. It would be the same thing--and you carry the burden. You've got to raise the price to get your money back.

Teiser: So it wouldn't be possible?

Kriesche: It wouldn't work.

Kriesche: And the waiters--they get no tip, and they take their time. "If I don't get it, why should I rush?" Now they rush because they want the tip. The minute you take the tips away, they say, "Well, mañana, mañana."

Teiser: It takes a pretty strong-minded and angry customer to go away without leaving a tip.

Kriesche: Well, I've seen it.

Teiser: Have you?

Kriesche: You're doggone right! And I don't blame them. Either he didn't deserve it, or he gets kind of sarcastic or something like that. I would choke him myself, after all. When you lose that kind of control, then you're gone.

Teiser: Some customers are unreasonable, aren't they?

Kriesche: They are.

Teiser: Then what?

Kriesche: You have to make the best of it, you know. Some of them, they [ask for] butter and butter and butter! They eat it, and then they get the gout! [laughter]

Teiser: Sometimes, do people say, "I want to speak to the manager"?

Kriesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Then what do you do?

Kriesche: I listen to them. If he's right, then you try to correct it. If he's just a crank, you don't pay any attention to him. Let him rave! You've got to use a happy medium in all things.

Teiser: As time has gone on, have people become more demanding about food?

Kniesche: In portions?

Teiser: No, quality.

Kniesche: Quality? Well, that comes from what kind of place you're going to, whether you get that kind of quality. If you have a chef who has his own way, or an easy way--well, he can make you or he can break you. If you don't watch it, and don't know any better, then you take it on the lam.

Teiser: Have people who come to the restaurant changed since 1922? Do you have a different kind of clientele?

Kniesche: Older people, they still eat like they used to. The middle aged, they want something fancy already. The younger class--well, they go to McDonald's, or eat frankfurters. The younger ones like that.

Teiser: You don't get many young people?

Kniesche: No.

Teiser: How about drinking? Have their drinking habits changed since Prohibition?

Kniesche: No, no. It goes just like it went before. People, they have more sense in drinking than they used to have. When a fellow is intoxicated, you don't serve him, see. They will drink vodka. Nobody ever heard of vodka before. This all came after Prohibition.

Teiser: Whiskey was before?

Kniesche: Yes. At that time, when you had whiskey, you poured your own drink years ago. They set a glass down, give you an ounce and a half glass, and you poured your own whiskey. Now if you give them a bottle, they fill the glass up to the rim. In fact, they would spill it over. You can't do that any more.

Teiser: In the thirties, did the people who came to your restaurant ask for mixed drinks?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. The main thing was Manhattans and martinis.

Teiser: Do people drink Manhattans much now?

Kniesche: Not much. They drink more martinis, and they want mostly straight gin. There's very, very little vermouth in there--hardly any. They want straight gin. They want a powerful drink.

Teiser: Any other mixed drinks that are popular?

Kniesche: Whiskey sours. A great many of them. Bloody Mary, which I don't ever drink. I drink beer and wine and Scotch whiskey with plain water.

Teiser: Do you serve just German beers or some American ones?

Kniesche: We have Olympia beer.

Teiser: And German?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Can you get German draft beer?

Kniesche: We have it.

Teiser: Always, since Prohibition?

Kniesche: Ever since beer came back.

Teiser: What kind of wines do you serve?

Kniesche: Oh, all kinds of wine. Imported wines and local wines, too.

Teiser: Not especially German wines?

Kniesche: We have some--German, French, imported wines.

Teiser: Do the wine distributors help you to select what kind of wines you want?

Kniesche: You have to find out yourself what's good and what's no good. There's just as much bad wine as good wine. The same thing with the beer. It's just like cigars--good cigars and bad cigars.

Teiser: Do you have cigars?

Kniesche: Well, there's a cigar stand, sure. Men want to smoke after dinner.

Teiser: The beers you buy from individual companies?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Do you buy the wines mostly from one or two places?

Kniesche: No, no.

- Teiser: A lot of different places?
- Kniesche: We have different places, different wineries. Better wine, and not so good.
- Teiser: Do your hard liquors come from one distributor?
- Kniesche: They're all different, and you can buy certain brands from nobody except from that distributor, so you have to deal with many of them. We get whatever the customer wants.
- Teiser: You don't sell as much wine as beer, do you?
- Kniesche: I tell you something, the wine-drinking the last few years improved immensely. I never seen people drink so much wine as they drink now. They used to drink more beer and cocktails and highballs. Lately there's a lot of wine drinkers. I myself take a big glass of wine at dinner.
- Teiser: Do you serve mostly white wines?
- Kniesche: That and the red wine. I drink red wine. I want more blood! [laughs]
- Teiser: As your wine sales have increased, the others have gone down by proportion?
- Kniesche: No, no.
- Teiser: It's just added?
- Kniesche: It adds to it.
- Teiser: Do younger people drink more wine?
- Kniesche: Yes, they drink more wine.
- Teiser: Why do you think that is?
- Kniesche: It depends. Just like when the vodka came in, they all drank vodka. Then the Scotch.
- Teiser: Do people drink wine at the bar?
- Kniesche: Some, not too many.

Changes

Teiser: We would like to know more about some of the old restaurants that probably you remember, the kind of food they served, and the kind of people who went there.

Kniesche: Well, I want to tell you something. It was all what you call cosmopolitan food, European food. There was some French-style, some German-style, some Italian-style. In the Italian style, they use more garlic and onions. In your German food, there's mostly sauerkraut and red cabbage.

Teiser: Why do you think San Francisco had so many good restaurants?

Kniesche: Because--I'll tell you why. People went to restaurants more to eat with their families. In San Francisco, Saturdays and Sundays, the places were packed. They were crowded. When the theater season was on, they all went to the restaurant before they went to the theater. When they came out of the theater, then they went in and had Welsh rarebit, oyster loaf and other things. They did a nice night business.

You'd be surprised--Fourth and Market streets at eleven o'clock at night was just as crowded as at twelve noon! Then it was close together--now it's spread all over. The people live farther out. They're moving out continuously.

San Francisco is getting less and less in population. Right now I hear those politicians that say they are going to put people to work--they can't put nobody to work! Not one! You have to help business first, to bring businesses up. They will hire more help, but they are killing the businesses with taxes. There's a business tax, all kinds of taxes. Everybody's moving out of San Francisco, the businesses too. Look down there on the other [south] side of Mission Street--they were all manufacturers, and they are all gone! Now they want to put that hocus pocus there; that [convention] center, and they fight among themselves. They don't know what they want, you know. They tore all those buildings down.

But they throw all the merchants out. You have to blame the politicians here. You got to earn the dollar before you can pay the taxes!. [pounds fist on table] Business pays the taxes. The fellow on relief doesn't pay any taxes. That's the one we are supporting now.

Teiser: And big business, not little business?

Kniesche: Well, it takes a big business to handle it.

Teiser: But the big businesses don't mind paying the taxes. It's the small manufacturers...

Kniesche: They kill them off, the small businesses. They killed them off. Now when the new tax sheet come out, there'll be quite a few going under--all moving out of town. They can't take it.

For instance, when you buy merchandise, and you have a good market--say everything is plentiful and you buy big. You only can buy for one year, because the next year you have to pay taxes on the same thing what you paid taxes on when you bought it.* You have to pay taxes on it again. You can't do no business the way you want to do business.

The damn politicians don't see that, because they don't know how! I can't understand it. Not once I've seen here, as long as I've been in the United States, that they took a businessman as vice-president or something. Always one politician, the other politician! This is good politics!

Then they tell you what should be done.

Teiser: We had a businessman mayor--George Christopher.

Kniesche: Yes. He was in the milk business.

Teiser: Was he a good mayor?

Kniesche: He was pretty good, yes.

Teiser: He understood business problems, do you think?

Kniesche: Yes. But then when you have all the others, you can't do nothing with it. Just like [John] Barbagelata and the other guy Quentin Kopp [on the Board of Supervisors]. They're the only two what's fighting it. [fighting to protect business taxpayers]

Well, I want to tell you something. Every politician that gets in, they overpay the city hall completely. Continuously they would raise the taxes--continuously. They

*The reference is to the San Francisco inventory tax.

Kniesche: would raise them. They would raise the taxes and they would raise their wages. They've been doing that for so many years, and now it's top-heavy. They spend more, and they put more people to work, more book work, more this, more that. They're getting in trouble!

Then they say, "We want to improve business!" Pretty soon, no one can build no more! When you get a little something done, it costs you twenty, twenty-five dollars. A fellow comes in to do something, to change your washers, and he'll charge you twenty dollars! I tell you something, they're absolutely out of their minds.

We still cook like we cooked sixty years ago. The same way.

Teiser: Can you get the same foods, though?

Kniesche: Well, we get some of them. Some they don't allow no more, like for instance striped bass. Ducks you can't serve no more, except for tame ducks. Wild ducks are prohibited.*

Teiser: How about the beef you get today? Is it the same?

Kniesche: Oh, that doesn't change.

Teiser: Chickens?

Kniesche: Chickens either. They all the same.

Teiser: People complain that the things you get now aren't as good as you used to get. I'm trying to think of what they would be. Vegetables--you don't use frozen vegetables?

Kniesche: Well, sometimes, when we can't get them.

Teiser: When you can't get the fresh?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Are they pretty good?

Kniesche: Yes, because you know, the ones they put in a can were fresh before. [laughs]

*See also p. 92.

Teiser: So you use both canned and frozen if you have to.

Kniesche: Today, most everything is frozen.

Teiser: Do you use a lot of frozen foods?

Kniesche: Well, certain things are. They don't make enough, so the man buys many at one time and has them frozen, like oxtails.

Teiser: How about the vegetables? What do you serve mostly?

Kniesche: Sauerkraut and red cabbage the most, of course. That's what they come in for. It's what fits the German food.

Teiser: Can you get red cabbage all year round?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: And you have creamed spinach.

Kniesche: Yes, spinach and string beans. Peas.

Teiser: Do you get any of the spinach frozen?

Kniesche: Sometimes.

Teiser: It's a lot easier to handle.

Kniesche: It's prepared pretty well.

Teiser: And the beans?

Kniesche: Same thing.

Teiser: When you were first in business, I suppose they had some frozen things, didn't they?

Kniesche: Very, very little. Hardly any. It was all fresh. I got the fresh spinach and broccoli and the peas. That all came in fresh at that time.

Teiser: When they first froze them, they didn't do them very well, did they?

Kniesche: No, but now you don't see much difference in them. It all depends on what quality you buy. There's a cheaper quality and good quality.

Teiser: Do you ever have any trouble with buying frozen foods that have been defrosted by mistake?

- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: You've never encountered that?
- Kniesche: If they come frozen, they're solid frozen.
- Teiser: I know that home consumers, when you get small packages-- every now and then somebody's clearly let them defrost.
- Kniesche: Yes, they get bad. The other day I went [to a grocery store] and I bought a cauliflower. I looked at it from the outside-- it was all in cellophane paper--and when I brought it home and opened it up, it smelled to high heaven! It was no good--couldn't do nothing with it. I couldn't even cut anything up, because it went all through the cauliflower.
- Teiser: Do you do much shopping for your home?
- Kniesche: Yes. But when I went for one cauliflower, I think I paid seventy-nine cents for one little cauliflower! Then I couldn't use a bit of it. You know, in that cellophane, it's nice. It keeps the air out. But when it gets bad, it really gets bad. It keeps everything in. [laughter] There's no way to escape.
- Teiser: When they deliver foods to you now at the restaurant, do they deliver them in different kinds of containers than they used to?
- Kniesche: Oh, yes. Like cellophane wrap and cartons. They put it in cartons now. It's different altogether.
- Teiser: How did you used to get it?
- Kniesche: Oh, everything was open.

Christmas Cards and Family Members

- Kniesche: [Mr. Kniesche's grandson T. Max Kniesche III enters the room. Mr. Kniesche introduces him.]
- Teiser: Oh, your grandson has brought some of the Christmas cards you mentioned.*
- Kniesche: These are the Christmas cards. Fifty-four, fifty-five, fifty-seven--'56 got lost, I guess. [goes through cards] '58, '59, '60, '62. Here they are from '62 to '76.

*See p. 97.

- Teiser: They're all the same size and shape.
- Kniesche: Yes, but they're all different.
- Teiser: They're on nice paper, folded over, in a French fold. Most are photographs but 1962 was a drawing.
- Kniesche: That's what we had on the wall, some of the pictures.
- Teiser: It shows the board with the bill of fare, and some deerheads and steins, and one of the murals. The bill of fare was on the wall.
- Kniesche: It's still on the wall today. We haven't changed it.
- Teiser: Here's a fine photograph from '72, in the restaurant, with you and your wife--
- Kniesche: --and my son and the fellow who just was here. [the grandson]
- Teiser: You had decorations up.
- Kniesche: We had a party one night, and we left it up for Christmas decorations.
- Teiser: Do you usually have a Christmas party?
- Kniesche: Yes, Christmas eve.
- Teiser: Who comes, special people?
- Kniesche: Anybody can come, with reservations. We have music, five-piece orchestra, and they really can play music. They dance to it. We have a big affair every Christmas eve.
- Teiser: Do the same people come, year after year?
- Kniesche: Yes, a lot of them.
- Teiser: When did you start that?
- Kniesche: A long time ago. About 1950.
- Teiser: In 1974, here's another photograph of the four of you standing in the doorway of the restaurant.
- Kniesche: Well, we got to have something different each year. [laughter] In '71, we had the whole family.

Teiser: Who are the others there? From left to right--who's this?
The girl sitting down?

Kniesche: This is my son's wife, Betty Ann, and that's their daughters Linda and Lisa [at far right]. And that's my sweetheart, and that's myself. In the picture [on the wall above] we had the fellows that came in every day. I can tell you all the names.*

Teiser: What was your daughter-in-law's maiden name?

Kniesche: It was Jenkel. He started a company with Davidson--Jenkel and Davidson. He died when he was forty-four years old. He had just started the company to boom.

Teiser: In this '71 picture, Max Junior is at your right. And this is Max III, standing to your left.

Kniesche: Yes. Max, Max, Max! [laughs]

Teiser: In some places, your name is given as Max T. and some place it's given as T. Max. Which is right?

Kniesche: T. Max is right. I just use Max.

Teiser: What does the T stand for?

Kniesche: Theodore.

Teiser: Nobody ever called you that?

Kniesche: No. [laughs]

Teiser: How about your son? What is he called?

Kniesche: My son is Junior, and the other one is Skippy. When we had a boat, we made him the skipper. [laughter]

Teiser: What kind of a boat did you have?

Kniesche: Oh, we had a nice boat, a 45-footer. Twin screws. The name of the boat was Almax II. We used to race it. We won the Hearst Regatta, we've won the Coast Guard Regatta, we won many first prizes. It was all on timing. The rougher the water was, the better we did. We had a very nice time.

Teiser: Were you the skipper?

*See pp. 157 and 160.

Kniesche: No, my son.

More Changes

Kniesche: When I started in business, the money from the cash register was all mine minus the bills. Now nothing belongs to me. It's either Uncle Sam or the city. There's a tax on taxes. There's a business tax, a sales tax, and income tax. Now they want some more new taxes. Well, they're going to kill the town! The people move out of town. The liquor industry has moved already. They all moved down to Brisbane and down beyond.

Teiser: These are the distributors?

Kniesche: Yes. They don't need to stay in San Francisco.

Teiser: There's not even a brewery left here, is there?

Kniesche: They're standing here, but they're all empty. South of Market Street, they tore everything down. They took all the middle-class business out of town. They killed them off. Now they say there's unemployment. Naturally! When you kill the place that employs people, then you won't hire anybody, and that's unemployment.

Then the politician comes and says, "I'm going to put you all to work"--he just makes me laugh. He's an idiot. He doesn't know what's going on in this world.

Teiser: Those big brewery buildings are just standing vacant?

Kniesche: Most of them, yes.

Teiser: Isn't it partly because there are fewer breweries in the United States now?

Kniesche: Well, the others got bigger and the small ones collapsed. I want to tell you, when the Lucky Lager came out, they had better beer than the imported beer. That was a real brewery. It was going good. I tell you, I've never seen beer like that before in my life. That was good beer. When the brewmaster died, the brewery died.

Teiser: What was his name?

- Kniesche: Kerber. I had a thousand shares in that company myself, from the Anheuser-Busch. If he stayed there, I tell you I would have made a million dollars with that thousand shares, because he had the best outfit I ever seen in my entire life. Just when the beer was ready--[thumps table]--he died. I had good luck, and I had bad luck.
- Teiser: When you went back to Germany that year, in the 1920s--
- Kniesche: 1921.
- Teiser: Did the beer taste different to you there than here? Did you like the German beer better than what you had been drinking here?
- Kniesche: It was better brewed in Europe. Here, it was made more out of chemicals. Over there, they make it the right way. Lucky Lager, they made it the right way.
- Teiser: Does anybody here make good beer now?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: What about steam beer?
- Kniesche: Do you know what steam beer is? That was young beer what you brewed at home, and was still fermenting when you drank it. That kept the steam. When you drink it, you still ferment it in your stomach. That gave you the back-door steam. [laughter] Outside of that, it would have been flat beer.
- Teiser: So you use, mostly, now in your restaurant imported beers?
- Kniesche: More imported beer than anything else.
- Teiser: How about Mexican beer?
- Kniesche: I don't want to bother with it. As long as I get European beer, I want to get the best beer. I don't want to get Mexican beer or Coors beer or the other beers what we have here.
- Teiser: What's the best beer?
- Kniesche: Lowenbrau. It's made in Munich.
- Teiser: Do you get that in--?
- Kniesche: --barrels.

Teiser: How big?

Kniesche: Thirty gallon barrels. It's pretty good beer. Of course, that is slipping too. Everything has to be made in a hurry now. They cut corners. I want to tell you something. Years ago--that goes for this country and Germany--they made everything perfect. The Japs imitated it and made it inferior. Now the Japs made it perfect, and we imitate it and make it inferior! [laughter] So in Germany also! We are going back. We are not going forward, we are going back. Only in certain things, we get there. With the big corporations and things, we are on top yet.

All in all, we are slipping.

Teiser: Do the Japanese make good beer?

Kniesche: They make good beer. They had all German brewmasters out there. They make good beer. I think the whole world is changing. It's so different, so different. Everything has to be quick. When you buy something in the hardware store, or something like that it's all junk. Even the lousy washer on the faucet. Years ago they had those fiber washers--they lasted a long time. Here you put a new one in--the next day it leaks. I tell you, I've had it. But what can you do?

Teiser: How about food? Is the butter you get today as good as the butter you got in the twenties?

Kniesche: Fresh butter, yes. They can't change the butter from the cow. It's the same animals. They haven't changed anything.

Teiser: We generally take a picture of people when we're interviewing them. May Catherine Harroun take a photograph of you as we go on talking?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Those are interesting Christmas cards.

Kniesche: We had some with the whole restaurant. Here's one.

Teiser: My word! This is from 1969, the chefs and the waiters and busboys. Are these Filipinos?

Kniesche: Yes. In the kitchen there are Filipinos.

Teiser: How about your waiters? Are they mostly German?

Kniesche: They used to be. But not now. Nowadays you got to take anything you can get.

Chefs, Waiters, Prices and Women

Teiser: You once had a relative who was your chef; a cousin?

Kniesche: He was a cousin,* but he died from asthma. All at once he got sick, and that was the end.

Teiser: What was his name?

Kniesche: Herbert Landes.

Teiser: They say that chefs have terrible dispositions. Is that right?

Kniesche: Well, he was very hard to get along with, but he was an A-1 cook, and everything had to be just so. And he could cut meat! When he cut a slice of meat and put it on the plate, it looked beautiful. [Sometimes] when you get things from a cook, first he has a bum knife, and then he has to saw the thing, and he makes hash out of a nice piece of meat. Spoils it.

Teiser: There's an art to it?

Kniesche: I should say there is.

Teiser: How do you keep your knives sharp?

Kniesche: We have a machine--we sharpen them ourselves.

Teiser: It used to be that people came around.

Kniesche: People came around with a great big sandstone and a wheel and the water dripping on there. They worked, and they cut it, and they ruined all the knives, because they cut too much off. Instead of sharpening the knife, they cut off the knife.

Teiser: Do you have good sharpeners now?

Kniesche: Electric.

Teiser: The chefs themselves--?

*See p. 69.

Kniesche: They take care of their own knives. Some of them, they are more ambitious. They're bright in this work. The other ones don't give a darn. Anything will do. You know how it is.

Teiser: Do most chefs have bad dispositions?

Kniesche: No. Some of them have nice dispositions, and some of them don't care what it is, and you have to go after them continuously. If you don't, you have a bum kitchen. They look out for an easy way.

Teiser: You're open now from late morning until evening.

Kniesche: Until nine.

Teiser: Do you have two chefs?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: When does the first one come?

Kniesche: The first one comes at five o'clock and stays until one. Then he leaves at one o'clock, and the other guy comes and stays until nine.

Teiser: So each has an eight-hour day. How about the waiters?

Kniesche: They work lunch and dinner, but they're still a split shift. They work two hours for lunch and three hours for dinner. The cooks work eight hours straight. Well, they can prepare something else during the slack time. But there's no work for waiters [between meals].

Teiser: When we were there one morning talking with you, about nine o'clock, I thought there were waiters setting tables.

Kniesche: Well, they come at nine o'clock, a couple of them, and then they set the tables.

Teiser: When you were a young man, working as a waiter, you worked longer!

Kniesche: We worked from eleven in the morning until two P.M. We came back at four and worked until two A.M. We worked thirty-one days a month, and we got twenty-five dollars a month. Yes, twenty-five dollars a month. But everything was cheap. A pair of shoes, a dollar and a half. Clothes were cheap. Like I said, a haircut was thirty-five cents and a shave was fifteen cents.

- Teiser: What kind of people become waiters now? When you were young, people who were ambitious--
- Kniesche: Yes, they were trained for it.
- Teiser: Where do they come from now?
- Kniesche: All over, all over. A fellow comes in the country and has no other trade, he gets his start in the waiter business. He first works in the club, and he works in the other places, the fast places. Ours is a fast place.
- Teiser: Fast?
- Kniesche: Quick. Everything is quick. You can't fool around. They all come at one time. In two hours, you have to do the business, from twelve to two.
- Teiser: Some of these waiters come from places where it's slower?
- Kniesche: That's right. You pay for your meal about six, seven dollars, and you get more service with your food.
- Teiser: I see what you mean. Your restaurant is considered medium-price? What do you call it?
- Kniesche: It's moderate.
- Teiser: You certainly give a lot of good food for the money, though.
- Kniesche: We tend to it. We run it ourselves. We have no bookkeeper. The only thing is, we have a cashier. For lunch, we have two. We are on the floor ourselves, and that's the difference, see? When I get up in the morning, I go down at eight o'clock, and then I make the cash for the whole day. I put the money in the cash register, and everything else. I sign the checks. They get a statement every month. That all has to be taken care of.
- Teiser: You sign all the checks?
- Kniesche: Yes. I love to! [laughs] Why we can give that kind of food for the money? We are economical. We have no tablecloths, and that's a big item, the tablecloths. When somebody spills something, you have to change it. When you have six people sitting at a table, you have nothing but trouble. Here, you wipe it off and you're done. See, they're highly varnished. That's my boy's job. He varnishes the tables every so often, and he does a good job.

Teiser: Your son, not your grandson?

Kniesche: Well, my grandson helps with it now.

Teiser: That's a big job! What do you do, take one or two out of circulation at a time?

Kniesche: No, we take about twenty tables out, one after another. On Saturday morning, we take them out on the sidewalk and sand them out there so the dust doesn't fly around, and wipe them off and bring them in and varnish them. That's all there is to it.

Teiser: By Monday, they're dry?

Kniesche: By Monday, they're dry.

Teiser: You've never been open weekends, have you?

Kniesche: I used to be open Saturdays. Then the union said you could only work five days a week. I said, "What's good for them is good for me," and I closed up Saturday. Why should I pay them double time on Saturday? So I cut Saturday out. It was really a good day, but you only live so long. No sense killing yourself.

Teiser: But now would Saturday noon be good?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Would it still?

Kniesche: It would do a big business, Saturday and Sunday. But I don't want to work seven days, and if you're not there--what you build up during the week, they kill you! It doesn't work.

Teiser: It says in a brochure about the restaurant (that you put out about 1972) that you started serving dinners in 1935. Is that right?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: That was before the Treasure Island fair.

Kniesche: Before the fair, a little bit.

Teiser: How did you happen to decide to do that?

Kniesche: Well, that was my aim from a long time ago, but I had to go slow, because it was a strictly man's place. So then I let the women come in at night time. When we had the Exposition over on Treasure Island, then it really popped up.

I tell you something, when we let the women in altogether, when the women's lib came along. That was the best thing that ever happened for me! I tell you something, the men didn't come so much no more, because they were going out with the women. Things came easier. Before that, everybody watched their own pocketbook, you know, but now the women have the same privileges the men have.

In fact, they have pants on, and the way I see them now, they all cut their hair short like men, and the men have the long hair, and they don't wash it often enough! [laughter] They look like hell! I think that men should wear skirts now! [laughs] Do something different! If the women can wear the pants, we can wear the skirts! What difference does it make? The men haven't got the guts the women have! They can put anything on and get by with it. [laughter] Am I right?

Teiser: What does your wife think of all this, of all the women coming in? Does she like it?

Kniesche: Sure. Now the women come in, and they bring the men in with them, you see. He doesn't have to pay the bill all the time, like he used to. Used to be, when he took a girl out, he had to pay it. Now they pay their own bill.

Teiser: Is that right?

Kniesche: Some of them make more money than the men make! Everything is different completely!

Teiser: Except that the food's still the same.

Kniesche: In our place, yes. But in many places, it isn't no more.

Teiser: I understand that in World War II, your son went into the service.

Kniesche: He was in the service for four years.* Then I took my wife in the business. I said, "Mother, you got to help me. I'm stuck!" I couldn't get no help no more. I had so much trouble with the dishwashers in the kitchen. I had Chinamen, I had women, I had everything. So one day, the Chinamen said, "We quit tonight!" So they all quit. Then I had to get some people for the next day. One time the chef quit, and I said to the second chef, "You come in early in the morning."

*See p. 169.

Kniesche: He said, "If he quits, I quit too." I said, "That's fine." So the porter came, and I said, "You go with them also. You might as well go." Then I came the next morning. I hired somebody. He didn't know where the salt was, where the pepper was, where nothing was down there. Well, from one hundred forty pounds I went down to below hundred and twenty!*

Teiser: My word!

Kniesche: I just was killing myself. Every so often I went up to the doctor. "Doctor," I says, "I gotta have a shot, an iron shot." So every so often, when I was down and out, I got pepped up again. Then one time I went to the doctor, and he said, "What do you want a shot for? I can't feel your pulse no more!" I said, "Holy smoke!" I went home, and I said, "To hell with everything!"

I took it easy, and believe me, it was high time. I'd had it, because I'm not full-blooded anyhow. I'm anemic. Maybe I told you that before--when I had my tonsils taken out--did I ever tell you about that?

Teiser: No.

Kniesche: Well, when I was a young fellow, I went to have my tonsils taken. It was a customer of mine. He drank a little heavy. He put me under gas. He laid me down there. I woke up, and I heard the nurse say, "Doctor, be careful!" With that, he cut the artery. They sewed this up, and swabbed all the blood out.

Then he went on the other tonsil and left half of it in. I lost a lot of blood. At that time, they didn't give no blood transfusions, and when they put me in the room, I heard the nurses--miles and miles away--say, "What's the matter with that fellow? He won't wake up!" A little bit more blood, and I would have been gone. I was weak for a year.

Then afterwards, I had to go back and have the other halves taken out. I went to Dr. Black; who took out those tonsils. I sat in that chair, and in four minutes, he had those two tonsils out without putting me under! That was the difference. Then I said to the doctor, "Doctor, I think I'm going to faint." He said, "Just a minute," and he fixed it up. He said, "Go ahead now and faint." I said, "Now I lost it!" [laughter]

*For further recollections of the World War II period, see pp. 139-141.

Teiser: Well, you're good and healthy now.

Kniesche: Oh, yes. I take care of myself.

Teiser: You do a lot too, apparently.

Kniesche: As a restaurant man, a saloon-keeper, I don't get intoxicated. I don't drink before five o'clock, and then at five o'clock, I drink maybe three highballs. After that, I don't drink no more, because you can't do everything. Just like in gambling--business and gambling don't mix, and drinking and business don't mix either. [laughter]

I tell you, I was a funny boy. I had so many experiences that I really, for my age, I was twice as old. I was twice as old as I should be from the experiences that I went through when I was young. What I've seen--I tell you something, some of them I can't describe, because after all--when the ships came in the harbor--you know, at that time they were coal burners, not oil. We didn't have oil yet, but coal burners.

The women would come over with those barges, and then get in the stewards' rooms. They'd get business. They had monkey business afterwards, because there was no sanitation there. [laughs] I tell you, that really was something!

Teiser: A port city was always supposed to be a wide-open city, wasn't it?

Kniesche: Yes. San Francisco was wide-open, but there was no rape. The boy took his girl out, gave her dinner, took her home, and then he went down where all the rest of them went. It was all wide-open. It was controlled, and it was sanitary. Now--I want to tell you something. I have letters every day--not every day, but often--from the universities, to contribute money for the venereal diseases. It's no good, it's no good for the girls. And it's not any more that people make a business out of it; it's just girls what hang around in some of the saloons. When the girls hang around, they go out with the men. They are looking for a good time, and they get paid that way.

Teiser: Do you ever have girls come into Schroeder's to pick up guys?

Kniesche: No. [laughter] No. I tell you, I never started that. I wouldn't. We have a family crowd here, people what come here with their children. That kind of person doesn't come

Kniesche: down here nowadays. For instance, you go into one of the places on the corner--cattycorner--that's where they go. Lots of girls feel sorry for it afterwards.

Cleanliness and Cold Glasses

Kniesche: In all my sixty years of business, I never had one fire. You know why? We keep our place clean. If you come in there Saturday, I will take you in the kitchen and you would say that everything is brand new. Our flue--you can go in there and put your hand down the flue.

Teiser: It's the flues that catch fire, isn't it?

Kniesche: Yes, they're full of grease. When the sparks fly up there, they catch. When that starts a fire, it's always a hundred percent fire, almost. When the grease comes down there, it's a flash fire.

Teiser: When I pass some restaurants, they smell as if they hadn't changed the frying grease for weeks. You have a smell of stale grease.

Kniesche: Not only that, you smell the toilet outside in other places. The idiots. We steam wash our glasses in a glass-washing machine, under high-pressure hot water. I don't think very many people have that in this town.

Teiser: It's an expensive machine, isn't it?

Kniesche: Well, it is expensive, but every glass gets washed that way. When I go to a place, the minute I step in I know if it's good or no good. The second thing is, when I travel on the road, I stop in a place, and the first thing is, I'm going to the dressing room. Then I decide if we are going to eat here, or we don't eat here. That's my barometer. I always go in the dressing room first and if the dressing room is clean, then everything else is clean.

Teiser: One thing that came in with women coming into your--

Kniesche: The lipstick? That's right. With that machine, there is no lipstick. Then we have an invention where we cool the glasses, the cocktail glasses and the wine glasses, what's on top of the bar. That's our invention.

Teiser: Did you patent it?

- Kniesche: Oh, yes. It's patented. Someday we're going to sell it. We haven't got time to fool around with it now. We started out with a small machine that you put a cocktail glass in, and you put a piece of ice in the glass. Do you know what that did, that ice? It cut the glass in two! You could take the top off. That shows you how the Titanic sank, when they hit that iceberg. All the steel plates got cut. They were a hundred percent safe sideways, but not the long ways. That's how that ship sunk. All from an iceberg!
- Teiser: The place that I know that has chilled glasses is the Nut Tree, up in Vacaville. How do they do those?
- Kniesche: They put it in ice. They have ice chests, and they put the glass in there.
- Teiser: Not any special device?
- Kniesche: No. Ours is inside, in the bar. When you pick the glass up, the glass is all white and frosted. It's not with CO₂, but with refrigeration. We started out with CO₂, but that's too dangerous.
- Teiser: Do you go to the restaurant shows, the conventions?
- Kniesche: I used to. My boy went over, and then his son. I don't go any more.
- Teiser: Did you used to?
- Kniesche: Yes.
- Teiser: Did you learn things?
- Kniesche: Yes. Some of it was nice, some of it was no good.
- Teiser: The ones we've been to seem to feature standardized foods-- everything the same everywhere, like McDonald's.
- Kniesche: I tell you, he has the biggest sucker game there is. He sells you the name. You have to pay for the building. Then afterwards, you have to buy everything from him. If you can't make it, McDonald's doesn't lose anything. McDonald hasn't got even the lease. The guy who buys it has the lease. When he goes over, it's his funeral.

Residences and Real Estate

Teiser: I wanted to go on with your residences. I found in the city directories that by 1924 you were living on Fifteenth Avenue.

Kniesche: That's right. After I came back from Germany, I had a house built on Fifteenth Avenue and Judah Street. I fixed up the garden. I used to have a wrought-iron fence there, and the people would sit there with their heels on it. They were swaying themselves, waiting for the streetcar! So I put a wrought-iron picket fence there, and they didn't sit there any more. They never would have got off! [laughs] That picket fence is still on there today, and the house is there. It looks just like it was built, years ago--the foundation is five feet high.

Then I sold that house, and I says, "I'm going to move." It was too foggy, and cold wind, because there were no houses there. The fog would stay out beyond Presidio Avenue. I said, "I want to live this side of Presidio Avenue." And that's how I got here.

Teiser: 1274 Filbert.

Kniesche: Yes, when I came here. I got that, like I told you, on a shoestring. In fact, I have a lot of property up here on this hill. I bought it all during the Depression.

Teiser: I've known some people who lived in a building that you own on Union Street.

Kniesche: 1048 Union Street?

Teiser: Yes. A nice building.

Kniesche: Well, it's three houses--one on the bottom, one on the side, one in front, and the garden in the center. Every room is an outside room.

Teiser: Mrs. Kniesche had a hand in real estate ventures, you said.

Kniesche: She'd say, "Daddy, I want this piece of property," and I was fortunate enough that I could make it, because that time I could make money. I put all my money in real estate. Believe me, it paid off. It paid wonderful.

Teiser: Your wife must have good judgment about real estate.

Kniesche: She is a smart little thing! She knows what it is. She's thrifty, very thrifty. She started with nothing. She had nothing, never got anything from anybody.

Teiser: You told us a story about your dining room table. Would you tell it again?

Kniesche: She had that made when we lived on Fifteenth Avenue. I said to her, "Honey, it's way too big for our home here." She said, "Daddy, I'm getting it. I'm looking for a bigger place." When we moved in here, it fit perfect!

Teiser: You said she was looking towards the future.

Kniesche: Yes. This thing over here came from Dr. [F.L. Canac] Marquis up the hill when she [his widow] sold the place to me.

Teiser: The big china cabinet?

Kniesche: The china cabinet. I tell you something--I don't know, everything came my way. And we took it, you know. You look in the front [room] there and see all the knick-knacks? I tell you something, we have gobs of them here. All the knick-knacks and all the things she has to have here. If we should ever have to move! [laughter]

You know when we sold the house up on Sixteenth Avenue and took a trip to Europe, I sold it lock, stock, and barrel, just the way it was. The woman came in and said, "This is just the place I like." I got myself out for a couple of thousand dollars. [laughs] I could have got a whole lot more. But I got my price, and I walked out of there, got the machine, sold the machine. I had nothing no more. The rest of myself was everything. I was going to go to South America, but I didn't. I came back here again.

Well, it was a good move, like everything else. I was here at the right time in the right place.

Teiser: You have acquired many interesting things.

Kniesche: You know, if I wouldn't have moved over here and got the idea to get out of the Sunset [district], I wouldn't get acquainted with the area. If I would have moved downtown somewhere, I would have been stuck. But here I came to the wide-open spaces, and it came all by itself.

Teiser: Did your wife find most of the things that you have here?

Kniesche: What?

Teiser: What you call the knick-knacks.

Kniesche: I don't say nothing.

Teiser: She sort of selected them?

Kniesche: Yes. She's all overstocked, to my way of thinking.

Yes, that's my sweetheart, in that picture. The other picture there is her together with my son. That's when they had the egrets. [i.e. wore egret feathers] She was a sweet girl.

Harroun: When was this picture taken?

Kniesche: Oh, that must have been--he was 15. About forty years ago.

Teiser: Where was that taken?

Kniesche: In San Francisco.

Teiser: In your home?

Kniesche: Yes. At that time, when they built houses, they built everything in gum.

Teiser: Eucalyptus.

Kniesche: They had the side buffet there all built in. They built nice houses at that time. My God, that house on Sixteenth Avenue with cobblestones outside the front, it looks just the same as when I bought it. No change at all, because they really put something in. And now? They dig a ditch that big, and then they put concrete in there, and that's the foundation.

Teiser: Four inches. [laughs]

Kniesche: That's a foundation. And then when you get in there, and you have a heavy rain or something, the house moves a little. [laughter] It does!

Teiser: A little if you're lucky. A lot if you're not! [laughter]

Recreations and Vacations

Teiser: Your grandson said that you had some stories about going back and forth on a ferryboat here in San Francisco in the early days.

Kniesche: No. In New York we had them. We used to row, with a rowboat, from New York to Hoboken, among the ferryboats. I couldn't swim. They just blew the horn, and you had to get out of the way. [laughter] When you're young, you'll do funny things.

Teiser: Did you learn to swim later?

Kniesche: A little bit. Not much. I never had the time.

Teiser: When you first came to San Francisco, there were ferryboats all across the bay.

Kniesche: Oh, but not so many. Not like New York. We went to Staten Island, Hoboken, farther up and so forth. They were going like bees. Here there was only once in awhile.

Teiser: Did you ever go to Shell Mound Park in the East Bay?

Kniesche: That park was in Emeryville. I went many times there.

Teiser: What was it like?

Kniesche: It was like Coney Island, or when we had the beach out here [in San Francisco] that had all the things there. They killed the beach altogether. Now they put some apartment houses there, and I don't remember what happened. There's nothing there.

Teiser: When you went to Shell Mound Park, would you stay all day?

Kniesche: Get there in the morning, and stay all day there.

Teiser: Did you have lunch there, or did you take a picnic?

Kniesche: Well, I was most of the time by myself or with a friend of mine. We got what you get in the park. You know, Idora Park used to be on the water. That's all filled-in. There's no more water there at all. But it was the same thing down here.

Teiser: In the Marina?

Kniesche: Yes. That's all filled in, the Marina. Almost up to the streets down here. It was all water. They filled it in when they had the 1915 Exposition.

Teiser: Do you remember before it was filled in?

Kniesche: Sure.

Teiser: Was it a nice neighborhood?

Kniesche: There were fishermen. That was the fishermen's wharf then. They had their nets out there, and it was all fishing boats at that time. The fishermen, they all lived down on the bay. On Bay Street down there. That's as far as the water came.

Teiser: When you went to Emeryville, that was when you were still going to the racetracks?

Kniesche: Yes, when I was a bad boy. [laughter]

Teiser: They didn't have any racing at Idora Park, did they?

Kniesche: No, no, no. Just at Emeryville Park.

Teiser: Tanforan was the other one, was it?

Kniesche: I was through already with the races when Tanforan came. I quit 1915. I quit the races, and I never touched them again.

Teiser: When you quit, were you ahead or were you behind?

Kniesche: Every horse player dies poor.

Teiser: So you were not ahead.

Kniesche: No! [laughter] They stay long enough, they all die poor.

Teiser: Your grandson said you went to a men's camp in the summers.

Kniesche: Yes, up there--now what was the town? I have it in my mind, and I forgot. Near Santa Rosa, we used to go to a place. Name was Hopland.

Teiser:D Did you go to Aetna Springs?

Kniesche: Well, we went to Aetna Springs in the summer when we were older, but when we were younger we went up there near Hopland. We had a whole bunch together.

Teiser: Was it a private camp?

Kniesche: Oh, it was just a bunch of friends together. The property belonged to a fellow. We had to go through three ranches to get there. It was absolutely secluded--no electric light, no telephone. We used to call it the nudist camp, because we just had shorts on and boots, on account of the heat and the stickers.

Teiser: Did you hunt and fish?

Kniesche: Fishing, yes. The creek ran right through the property. It was nice.

Teiser: Was there a house, or lodge?

Kniesche: Yes, we had a pretty nice shack there.

Teiser: How many of you?

Kniesche: Sometimes ten, sometimes fifteen.

Teiser: Who were the other men?

Kniesche: Well, two of them worked in the Emporium. Another fellow worked in the Palace Hotel. We were all scattered all over. During the summer, on the vacations some of them left and came, you know.

Teiser: All men, though?

Kniesche: All men. Really, we had a wonderful time.

Teiser: Who was the owner of the ranch, of the property?

Kniesche: He was a dentist, Dr. Eugene Nicholas.

It was always that everyone was welcome there. You had to make it yourself, bring your own food and everything else.

Teiser: You didn't have a cook?

Kniesche: [laughs] No, sir.

Teiser: You all cooked?

Kniesche: Yes. Then we went into town and bought stuff, and we cooked it together for the whole bunch.

Teiser: When was that?

Kniesche: I have to think. It was in the 1930s.

Teiser: Did you play cards?

Kniesche: We played cards and horseshoes.

Teiser: And cussed?

Kniesche: Plenty of it! [laughs] Otherwise, it wouldn't be healthy. [laughter]

Teiser: All the things that you weren't supposed to do at home.

Kniesche: That's right. We left off the steam. I'll bring some pictures along to show. I got them down at the restaurant.

Teiser: How long did it take you to get there? You drove up, I guess.

Kniesche: About an hour and a half.

Teiser: Later you went to Aetna Springs, is that right?

Kniesche: Yes. Later when we went on a vacation, we went together to Aetna Springs.

Teiser: You and your wife?

Kniesche: Yes. We were about four couples. We met generally up there in Aetna Springs and stayed there.

Teiser: How long?

Kniesche: Two weeks.

Teiser: Then you couldn't cuss.

Kniesche: No, you couldn't but you get in the open spaces and get rid of what you have in you. I mean, in cussing. [laughs]

Teiser: What did you do? How did you amuse yourselves all that time?

Kniesche: Playing cards, going swimming in the tank, and so forth and so on. Hikes in the morning--we'd hike over the hills.

Teiser: Have you always been a hiker?

Kniesche: Always loved the fresh air and walking. When I get here in the city, I don't take the streetcar. When I can walk, I walk. Years before, when we were in Schroeder's, we closed

Kniesche: up at three o'clock in the afternoon. My wife and I would walk to our house on 47th Avenue. We'd walk on the beach, and took our time. We hiked a lot of times. I love to walk.

We used to walk up Mt. Tamalpais and beat the train. We used to call it the cockroach train. You know, it used to go up there and start down from Mill Valley. We would go straight up the hill and beat the train every time, before the train even got up. We used to do a lot of hiking. We hiked all the way around Mt. Tamalpais. We started in Mill Valley and came out in Fairfax--all the way around. We had been to Bolinas, down by the ocean, walked down there.

Teiser: And you've always belonged to the Olympic Club?

Kniesche: Yes, for many, many years.

Teiser: You don't walk down to the restaurant now, do you?

Kniesche: Sometimes, sometimes. Going down, but not coming up. [chuckles] It doesn't work that way any more.

Teiser: You were saying that you go down to the restaurant every morning at eight.

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: How long do you stay?

Kniesche: Until two o'clock in the afternoon. Then I come home and work a couple hours in the garden, and then I go back. I leave here at four o'clock and get down there at half-past four.

Teiser: When do you come home?

Kniesche: Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine o'clock--it all depends on how you get stuck with some of the customers. You talk here and talk there. Before you know, it's interesting and it's nine o'clock.

Teiser: When do you eat your dinner?

Kniesche: At six o'clock, before the rush starts. Before that, I have a couple of highballs.

Teiser: You have your lunch there too, don't you?

- Kniesche: Yes. I don't drink during the day, but I drink at nights before dinner. I love a couple of highballs.
- Teiser: At the bar there?
- Kniesche: When I bring the wife down with me, we sit down there where there are benches and drink there. Then she meets some people which come in--they know her, and it gives her relaxation.
- Teiser: What time do you eat your lunch?
- Kniesche: Before twelve, about half-past eleven.
- Teiser: Everything works out beautifully, doesn't it?
- Kniesche: Everything is timed.
- Teiser: You were speaking earlier of owning a Maxwell automobile. Your grandson said that he thought that you had used the car not just to go around in, but for something special.
- Kniesche: Oh, wait a minute. That's how it started--you know when the jitney buses started? Somebody wished a second-hand car onto me, a Maxwell. With wheels that big, you know--an old-timer, like a railroad engine. [laughs] I couldn't drive no car, so I had someone drive it [as a jitney]. I was standing there, a young punk kid. I'm in business. I recall running up and down Market Street. The fellow, he gets sore, and he says, "You can take your bus there and do with it whatever you want to."
- I was standing in the middle of the street, and I couldn't drive it. [laughs] I had to hire somebody to take the darn thing off the street. So I traded it in, and got myself a small Maxwell at that time, like Jack Benny had in the show. A four-cylinder Maxwell. I learned to drive then. I paid \$650 for it, had it two years, had two accidents with it, and sold it for \$850. Cars were scarce.
- Teiser: When was that?
- Kniesche: That was 1915 to 1918. During the exposition.
- Teiser: The jitney that you got, that you had the man drive--how many people would it hold?
- Kniesche: Seven.
- Teiser: And it just went up and down Market?

- Kniesche: Well, up and down to Valencia Street.
- Teiser: That was a pretty good business to be in, as long as it lasted, wasn't it?
- Kniesche: [laughs] No. Sometimes you came home with money and sometimes you didn't. I had no control over it. [laughs] But anyhow, I got a lot of fun out of it.
- Teiser: That was when jitneys were a nickel?
- Kniesche: Yes, a nickel. Moving pictures were five cents.
- Teiser: You could take the jitney and go to the movies and come home for fifteen cents.
- Kniesche: Well, you went out to the picnic, to Shell Mound Park, with a dollar, you came back with change. [laughter] That's a fact! Beer was five cents. A dollar was a lot of money at that time. A lot of money. You could buy a lot of things with a dollar.
- Teiser: Your grandson said that you're an opera fan, too. You used to go to the opera a lot.
- Kniesche: We used to go to the opera and the light opera. We had pretty good seats in the front, and I would take the wife. It didn't work out any more, so I gave the tickets to my boy, my grandson, and he uses them now. I like good music. Good music and good dance music. I love to dance! I tell you, when the music's starting, the real music down there--my toes tingle! They want to go! [laughter]
- I enjoyed dancing. The wife can't dance any more, so I don't dance either. I don't want to make her feel bad, when she sits there and she can't dance.
- Teiser: Your wife doesn't walk well now, is that it?
- Kniesche: Yes, she can't. She couldn't dance anyhow. She can't walk by herself.
- Teiser: How long has that been?
- Kniesche: Since a couple of years when she had a stroke.
- Teiser: That's too bad.
- Kniesche: High blood pressure.

Teiser: What kind of operas did you like, particularly?

Kniesche: I don't care, so long as there's good music in it.

Teiser: Do you like Wagner?

Kniesche: That one I like. I like all good operas, if there's good music in it. I love music.

Teiser: Do you like the Italian operas?

Kniesche: Yes, they're nice. They always have good music.

Teiser: When did you start going to the opera?

Kniesche: It just came naturally.

Teiser: Always, since you've been living in San Francisco?

Kniesche: Well, the later years I came, when I was married. Not before.

Teiser: Has it changed much?

Kniesche: What?

Teiser: Opera.

Kniesche: [laughs] Oh, yes. They change like everything else changes. For instance, when they played Die Walkure, and the big husky maids come out--the last time I was there they had all young little girls in there! I tell you something, I got so disgusted, because they didn't fit the part. But some fellows--what's our friend there, who runs the opera?

Teiser: [Kurt] Adler?

Kniesche: Adler. I think he had the idea to put something new and different. But it didn't fit. [laughter]

Teiser: Little skinny Valkyries, hmm? [laughs]

Kniesche: Little skinny ones!

Teiser: Do you think that the opera, in general, has got better as the years have gone on?

Kniesche: Well, they try to take the old stuff out and put new stuff in. They're not made for that.

Teiser: You like the more traditional ways of putting the operas on?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Before this opera house was built, was opera given at various places in the city?

Kniesche: After the fire, they had it in Dreamland Rink. A number of times they had the opera there, and when the act was finished, and the music played the prelude, they'd be hammering behind the stage to make the artificial scenery, because they didn't have anything there at that time. That fellow played the prelude three times, I think, and finally he quit until they finished hammering. [laughter] Everything was makeshift after the fire. There was nothing there.

Reiser: But still they gave the operas?

Kniesche: Yes, they gave the operas.

Teiser: Your grandson also said that you love animals. Is that right?

Kniesche: I do.

Teiser: What kind?

Kniesche: Anything. Cats, dog, anything. Women, my wife. They all animals! [laughter]

Teiser: What kind do you have, besides your wife?

Kniesche: We had a cat. I tell you, I had one cat especially. But they all slept in the basement. They didn't sleep in the house. I had a dog and a cat. When I went in the garden and spaded the garden, the cat would sit on my shoulder and watch what was down there. [laughter] One time, she had young ones. She brought her young ones from downstairs--she laid them all in front of the kitchen door, because she knew they'd be taken care of. [laughter] It was the cutest thing.

Teiser: You don't have any pets now?

Kniesche: Well, the family had a dog. A little small dog with the wire hair. By God, it got killed--run over by an automobile about three months ago. Smart little dog.

Teiser: You don't take it to the restaurant, do you? Did you take the dog to the restaurant?

Kniesche: Whenever I do, I put him up in the office. He can't be down below. No dogs in the restaurant at all.

Teiser: Do you like to go to the zoo? Do you like the animals out there?

Kniesche: Well, I do, but I don't care much for zoos. You know, you can go in the zoo because you like to watch the monkeys and their antics, when they play or something. But if you go to one zoo, you've gone to most all of them. They all alike.

Teiser: I think you told us a little bit about having powerboats. You belonged to the St. Francis Yacht Club, is that right?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: When did you buy your first one, do you remember?

Kniesche: 1946. My boy was 22 years old.

Teiser: What did you name it?

Kniesche: The Almax. My wife's name is Alma and my name is Max. Almax.

Teiser: And you had another one?

Kniesche: I had a bigger one. That was a 36-footer; then we had a 45-footer, the Almax II.

Teiser: Did your wife like to go out on the bay?

Kniesche: Well, fair. She was not a good sailor. She was not a good sailor. I know when we went to Europe, she got seasick before she got on board the ship. [laughter]

Teiser: It's pretty rough out on the bay sometimes.

Kniesche: It was pretty rough out there sometimes, oh yes. I've seen the bay very rough.

Teiser: You and your son were the sailors?

Kniesche: Yes. Then the [grand]children, they almost were born on the boat.

Teiser: Would you go out overnight?

Kniesche: Yes, up to the San Pablo Bay all the way up to Stockton and Sacramento.

Teiser: And you won races too, you said.

Kniesche: Yes.

Tieser: Do you have some cups?

Kniesche: Yes. I got them all in the restaurant. My boys got them.

Labor Troubles of the 1930s

Teiser: Back to the restaurant--when you became an employer, did you join the restaurant owners' association?

Kniesche: No. I never did. When they went on the strike that time, in 1936, I didn't belong to the restaurant association, but as long as they closed up, I closed up voluntarily. I was the only man what had no debts. When I went on the strike, I wrote everybody a check out and paid everybody in full. I had a good name all the time. My credit was sky-high, triple A. Even today, when I go out there and somebody answers, "Schroeder's? That's okay." No questions asked.

The strike lasted for sixty-six days. When the fiftieth day rolled around, most of the owners wanted to go back to work. They were going broke. Some of them hollered so loud, including George Mardikian, that finally they settled the strike and didn't gain much in the contract. If they stayed out for a couple of additional weeks we would have won the strike and broke the union's back.

That was the reason I said to them, "Just go ahead and go back. I don't belong to anybody." I said, "If I can't make it go, I lock the door. That's all there is to it."

Teiser: This was during the Depression.

Kniesche: During the Depression, yes.

Teiser: What was the cause of the strike?

Kniesche: I think that was on account--they raised the wages and a shorter work day. So they had a strike against the [employers'] association. When they went out, I went out too. But I was

Kniesche: the only one who was solvent. When I went out, I wrote everybody a check and paid all my bills. I didn't owe anybody. All the rest of them were in debt.

Teiser: How long did you stay closed?

Kniesche: I think it was for sixty-six days.

Teiser: Did any restaurants stay open?

Kniesche: Some of them were open.

Teiser: Were the big ones closed?

Kniesche: No, those were open and the other ones were open. But the ones in the middle--they were closed. They were on strike.

Teiser: The hotels were open, and the little cafes were open?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What were the other well-known restaurants on strike then?

Kniesche: Well, all those middle-class restaurants were closed. I know that Tait's was closed. Mardikian's, all the Fashions (Henry, Louis, Charles) were closed. There were about fifty restaurants closed. Then they wanted to go back to work, and when they hung around, I said, "I'd better row my own canoe from now on. If I can't make it go, I lock the door and go home. But I'm not going to fool with you fellows no more."

Teiser: How was it settled, finally?

Kniesche: Like everything is settled. One gives in, the other gives more. You always come out the loser when you're in business. You always take a beating.

Teiser: You say that it was Mardikian who first gave in then?

Kniesche: Yes. He was in bad shape at the time.

Teiser: So he thought he'd better start making some money?

Kniesche: Well, I guess they wanted to go back, see.

Teiser: I didn't realize that Mardikian had been in the restaurant business then.

Kniesche: Yes. He only got famous during the war. You know why? He went over to Germany and showed them how to cook roast beef, because they had no roast beef. Furthermore, they had

- Kniesche: no meat, and how the hell could he cook roast beef? It was all hocus-pocus. That's when Mardikian came up the ladder. Then he played with the government.
- Teiser: At the time of the general strike of 1934, could you tell in advance that all the workers in the city were going out?
- Kniesche: They all were going. It was a general strike--you couldn't get no gas, except that doctors could get the gas. I had to go out and get my own meat and everything else.
- Teiser: Where did you get the meat?
- Kniesche: From the black market, you know. I was on Howard Street one day to get some meat, and I was standing outside of my car--I had a small car--and I just saw a car coming down the street and the driver fell over the seat. I jumped on the sidewalk, and he came right in the rear of my car. His bumper hit my bumper. If I had been standing there two seconds before, I would have lost both legs. They would have cut them right straight off. I just looked back. I don't know why, but I did.
- Teiser: What do you think he was trying to do?
- Kniesche: I don't know. He was drunk or he had a heart attack. I don't know.
- Teiser: He wasn't trying to prevent you from buying your meat?
- Kniesche: Oh, heck no! I was glad I could go, because there was little damage done to the car. But his bumper went over my bumper.
- Teiser: It didn't have anything to do with the strike, then?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: You kept your restaurant open during the general strike?
- Kniesche: Yes, we did. With a lot of trouble, but we kept it open with no help. I had my nephew as a cook, and I had one dishwasher who stayed with me, and myself and the wife. That's all. Everything was fifty cents. They helped themselves, and they'd get their own coffee. On the way out, they threw fifty cents on the bar, and that was all. I made more money then than I made before. [laughter]
- Teiser: You might have worked harder--did you?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: And your wife worked harder?

Kniesche: She sure did. We'd wash the dishes afterwards, in the afternoon.

Teiser: This was when the longshoremen went out and everybody went out?

Kniesche: Everybody went out, when they had the shooting there on Front Street and Pine. Everybody went out.

Teiser: Could you tell that the general strike was coming on? Did you anticipate it?

Kniesche: Well, they were fighting all the time. The union got bigger and bigger. Now they want to be supported from the cradle to the grave. I think we going to have a lot of trouble, especially in San Francisco, because San Francisco is the strongest union town, and pays the highest wages. What we pay here for real estate, you pay back East half price. Our prices are way too high. You get no work out of the laborers. You ought to see them, when you have an electrician out here, how they loaf around and loaf around. If you get two hours work out of them in eight hours, you really got something.

Right today, we got a couple of big wholesale butchers going out of business. What the union wants, they won't give them. They're going out of business because it doesn't pay for them to stay open. In fact, any business doesn't pay no more. There is more businesses broke today, insolvent, than you can shake a stick at. The trouble is, like I say, the politicians. They make me laugh. They always talk, "We put people to work!" They couldn't put one to work! Not a single one!

It's the business itself what creates the work, and put them to work. They can put nobody to work, except to make the city hall bigger and the federal building bigger and get more of those things. But the working man they can't put to work.

Provisions and Wartime Problems

Teiser: How did you manage during the Second World War?*

Kniesche: Well, you couldn't get no butter, you couldn't get certain things. Then you have to put in a substitute. One woman wanted honey from me. I had no butter. I said to her, "Butter we have to use for cooking." She wanted the honey, and I said, "No honey." She reported me to the WP--whatever that was. I had to come up in front of a court. They said, "Why didn't you give her honey?" I says, "Can you imagine a place like this putting [out] honey? There'd be honey all over! With the honey comes the ants and God-knows-what, and there would be a fine mixup." You know what they said to me? "Do the best you can." I said, "That I'm doing anyhow."

Teiser: How did you manage with meat rationed so severely?

Kniesche: Well, by the time the meat ration went out, I was thousands of points short. The fellow with the coffee and the doughnuts, he got points. I served nothing but meats with the same points, so it didn't work out that way.

Teiser: They let you go into debt on points, did they?

Kniesche: Well, if they'd ever checked me, I'd be way down. God knows where I would have been.

Teiser: But your suppliers went along with you?

Kniesche: Well, they were in the same problem that I was.

Teiser: Have you had the same suppliers over a long period?

Kniesche: I was with a butcher over forty years, and then he went out of business.

Teiser: Who was he?

Kniesche: F. Uri Company. He was an old-time butcher. I'm with Del Monte Meat Company now.

Teiser: You always deal with just one butcher?

*See also p. 118.

Kniesche: Well, with what they have. I deal with the fellow who has the beef at the right price, and then I deal with the fellow down there who has the smoked beef. Another has corned beef. [phone rings]

Teiser: You were saying they all specialize?

Kniesche: Yes. I have Roberts,* they make nothing but corned beef and corned tongues.

Teiser: Is the corned beef today as good as it used to be?

Kniesche: Yes. It's the same thing. Now some of them specialize in veal. We buy veal from them.

Teiser: How about poultry? Do you have a separate poultry supplier?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Do you get ducks?

Kniesche: We have duck every Wednesday.

Teiser: Western ducks or eastern ducks?

Kniesche: I guess eastern ducks. They have no more ducks out here. I tell you something--in the east, we get the Long Island ducks. Here, I don't know where they come from. They're a little smaller, you see. They're not as good as the Long Island ducks.

Teiser: How about your vegetables? Do you get them from one place?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Is it the same place you always have?

Kniesche: Yes, for a long time.

Teiser: Do they come directly from the produce market?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

Teiser: What company is that.

Kniesche: I know it as good as I know my name--Moreggia [& Son].

*Roberts Turkey Brand Corned Meats

Teiser: I think your grandson said that during World War II, there was an incident in which someone was arrested for being a German agent, and his photograph was taken in front of your restaurant.

Kniesche: No, that was the consul, Wiedemann. He went to hotels, and he came down to me a couple of times. Because it was a German restaurant, they made a big scene out of it. It didn't do me no good.

Teiser: Fritz Wiedemann.

Kniesche: Fritz Wiedemann. He was a heck of a nice fellow. After all, a man who represents his own country, he represents his own country and nobody else. We do the same thing when we go to other places. Even in Africa, we tell them now what to do, which is absolutely crazy. I think we don't know what's going on there.

Teiser: There is a photograph taken of Fritz Wiedemann taken in your restaurant, or in front of it?

Kniesche: Could have been.

Teiser: I thought your grandson said that it had been in Life magazine.

Kniesche: Could have been.* What did I have to do with it? I had a tough time myself. I was a German, I had trouble--especially from the kids. I tell you, we went completely crazy in the First World War.

Teiser: And the second world war too?

Kniesche: Not as bad. In the first one, we went completely crazy. Then they took all the Japs what were citizens, born here, and put them in concentration camps in the Second World War. I tell you something, we acted absolutely panicky.

Teiser: You told us your view about how World War I came about.**

Kniesche: You bet your sweet boots! They don't teach that in college, either! But I lived the truth. I saw it, and I kept my eyes open.

*One photograph taken inside and one in front appeared in Life magazine, June 26, 1939.

**See pp. 58-60.

- Kniesche: When I see something, I stop on the street and watch it. Anything. If somebody does something I've never seen before, I stay there and watch them. I'm half a mechanic myself. I love electrical work, plumbing work, and all things like that.
- Teiser: Did you do some work yourself on your boat?
- Kniesche: That was built over in Stockton. We had it built.
- Teiser: Do you have a workshop where you do some things for a hobby? Do you build things, make things?
- Kniesche: See the wall [outside] there? All the bricks there in the garden? I laid all that concrete work. My boy and I, we got the rocks together. I terraced the garden that was just a wild hill. I terraced it all up and made it look like something. I enjoy that. I'm working on something now, up on the hill. I'm going to put in some sweet peas, a row of giant sweet peas. They grow as high as this room.
- Teiser: You have a sunny wall to put them against?
- Kniesche: No. Actually, there's a lot of wind there. I have to build an extra thing, where they can climb on. Otherwise, the wind pulls them all off.
- Teiser: That's wonderful--keeps you out in the fresh air.
- Kniesche: Well, that's what I do it for. And don't think. You just give it a little water, and when you come back to the plant, the plant bows to you for the water. [laughter] That is true! While you're gone, they raise their heads. That little bit of water did them so much good.
- Teiser: When did your son come into the restaurant to work?
- Kniesche: Actually, when he was born he started in. [laughter] I started him from little.
- Teiser: Did you take him down when he was a youngster?
- Kniesche: Yes. Oh, yes. I tell you something--one time he wanted to go to the bank. I think he was seven or eight years old. I said, "All right. Go ahead. Get there." He came running back. He hollered from the street, "Daddy! I got it in! I got it in!" [laughter]
- Teiser: He made a deposit?



Fritz Wiedemann leaving Schroeder's Cafe, 1939

Kniesche: Yes. He said, "Daddy! I got it in!" [laughs] We went back up there when he came back down, and the fellow asked him, "Is everything all right?" He said, "My daddy never makes a mistake, and neither do I!" [laughter] I tell you, he liked his daddy at that time, I tell you. We raised him with love and discipline. That's the only thing you need.

He was a little bit shy, so if a little boy came in, I'd get to talking about him. I'd say, "Would you like to meet him?" and he'd say yes. So I'd introduce my son to him. I says, "Sucker, I got you in. See how you get out!" [laughter] So without him knowing, I finally gave the kid confidence. Finally, when a boy came in, he went over there before I even invited him to. He beat me to it.

Teiser: Where did he go to school?

Kniesche: He went right from the start, from the kindergarten, to the private schools. I believe in that, because I didn't have it.

Teiser: Where did he go here?

Kniesche: The Damon School for Boys. Then he went to San Rafael, the Tamalpais School for Boys. He went in all private schools. I believe that. It's hard to get up. You always can step down. But to get up, you need a little help.

Teiser: Did he learn the restaurant business just from you?

Kniesche: From being with me, he knows everything. Believe me, I tell you something, he can cut meat better than a cook or anything like that. He can do anything in the restaurant, from the management to being the porter. If the sewer stuffs up, he goes in there and cleans that sewer out, better than a plumber.

Teiser: So he has some mechanical ability too?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. And painting--he painted this whole apartment up here. Everything is just exact--it's not smeared over here, smeared over there. When he works, he works perfect.

Teiser: Did he work part time with you when he was in school?

Kniesche: Any time he had time, he would.

Teiser: In the summer?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

- Teiser: What did he do when he was a little kid, when he first came in to the restaurant?
- Kniesche: We had him in the kitchen--there's always a little something there. It got him interested in it.
- Teiser: Did he ever want to do anything else than go into the restaurant?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: Then he came to you directly from high school?
- Kniesche: He went to high school, and when he was eighteen years old, he had to go into the army. He went in the Air Force, and he was in there for four years. When he came out, he said, "Dad, I'm not going to college. I'm going into your business." I said, "Okay, from this day on, you're a partner." I fixed it up, made a corporation out of it. My wife has so many shares, he has so many shares, and I have so many shares.
- Years afterwards, we'd give him every year so many shares, and I turned the business over about ten years ago to him. He has all the shares. I'm working for him now.
- Teiser: You are! I hope he's a good empoyer. [laughter]
- Kniesche: Well, I told him many times, I never would work for you! [laughs]
- Teiser: Do you get union wages?
- Kniesche: Wages don't bother me. [laughter] The business belongs to him. There's no use waiting, saying, "You have to wait until I die." He had it way before.
- Teiser: And now his son's in?
- Kniesche: His son is in, and I think he's going to do the same thing.
- Teiser: He went to college?
- Kniesche: He went to college and got his master's in University of Denver in Colorado.
- Teiser: What did he study?

Kniesche: Business administration and hotel and restaurant management,* and I don't know what else.

Teiser: Then you've got good successors.

Kniesche: Well, he starts from the top down, and the other one came from the bottom up. I believe in the bottom up. [laughter] You know, you learn the fundamentals from the top down in a restaurant, but no house was built from the top down, except in China. Here they build from the bottom up. Then you get everything what comes through you. When you get up there, you work with the bookwork and this work and that work. You don't come to the real work.

Teiser: Did your grandson work in the restaurant when he was little, before he went to school?

Kniesche: Yes, some times.

Teiser: So he really didn't know what the kitchen was like?

Kniesche: Well, he hung around there and talked with the cooks. [laughs] But he's good. I want to tell you something--he can go in the kitchen and help along there now, and wash the floor. When I go through there, I see right away when there's something missing. I don't have to look for it. I see it right away, which he doesn't see. Maybe later on, when he gets more used to it.**

Teiser: How about your son--does he see that sort of thing?

Kniesche: Oh, yes. But he's not as perfect as I am, either. Really, I've been in the business longer than he has. When something comes out of the kitchen, I see right away--uh, uh. That doesn't work. Take it back again.

Managing Schroeder's Cafe

Kniesche: I look at everything. I see when the beer isn't drawn right, with no head on or too big of a head or things like that, or when a mixed drink goes out and it's not mixed up. I see all of that--I don't know, it's second nature with me.

*See also p. 169.

**See also pp. 169-170.

- Teiser: If I order a dinner, are you likely to have seen it?
- Kniesche: Not all of it. You know, when I see someone [a diner] digging around, I go right up and ask, "Is something wrong with it? Don't you like it?" Sometimes people order something, and it's not what they wanted.
- Teiser: Suppose somebody calls you and says, "This isn't what I wanted," or "This doesn't taste right." What do you do?
- Kniesche: Well, I find out if it does or not. I go right back in the kitchen and try it before I take it away from them. I go back in the kitchen and find out for myself. Maybe he's just a crank.
- Teiser: Do you have many cranks?
- Kniesche: No. Here and there, naturally, in our line of business. Some of them, they kick before they sit down. [laughter] The public is funny. Some are very nice, some are cranky.
- Teiser: Is it any different than it used to be?
- Kniesche: No, it's been like that all the time--since Adam and Eve's time. [laughs]
- Teiser: Does it make any difference having women come?
- Kniesche: Right now? No. It's better to have women.
- Teiser: Are they crankier than men? Are they fussier?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: Easier to please?
- Kniesche: Yes. Especially when you have a smile for them. [laughter] But some women are natural-born cranks, believe me. You can see it right on their face. If they are good-natured, they don't reflect cranky. So are men. That's for both sexes. Then you can see how the kids are raised when the kids come in. Some of the kids--I'd like to have them just with me for a half an hour once. [chuckles] Others are nice, very nice. You go out of your way--we have some little steins to give away for the kids that they can drink their milk out of. Or we give them a lollipop. But when we get a crank, I'd like to give them a slap on the rear.

Kniesche: But most of the time, it's the parents' fault. You know? When I pull a chair for the wife and the kid comes and sits down, I say, "Get away down there. That's for your mother." "Oh, let him sit down there," the wife says. I says, "Fine, thank you. Now that's a way to raise a child. He's going places!" And then I walk away, and I don't go near them any more.

It's their own fault! You've got to raise the kids to respect you right from the start. If you don't put the respect in them, you don't have nothing, believe me.

Teiser: Are they any better behaved than they were ten years ago?

Kniesche: There are wild ones and good ones, and they aren't any different. But the parents are a little more lax today. They play golf, they go here, they go there. The kids are running wild. Look at the Hearsts! Isn't that something? I feel sorry for the family, but in another way I can't sympathize with them. It must have been their own fault. They didn't spend any time with them to raise their children.

Teiser: Do people bring their kids out more than they used to?

Kniesche: They do. But I can only tell you what we have now, with the men and women who come in. They're about the same as before. Most of the time it's outsiders, from out of the city, with children. The others with children eat at home.

Teiser: Do you have a special menu for kids?

Kniesche: No. Half-price child's portions.

Teiser: Is there any difference?

Kniesche: No, no. After all, a child can't eat a big portion like that. Why should they pay for it?

We are one restaurant that doesn't serve regular dinners. I don't believe in dinners. It's too much waste. They nibble on this, they nibble here, and everything goes in the garbage can. So give them a decent meal. We give them a good potato salad and a good coleslaw, and that's the only salad.

Teiser: And a big portion for the main dish?

Kniesche: Yes. Then we have dessert. We have the cheesecake and our own recipe for huckleberry squares, which you can get nowhere, and apple strudel.

Teiser: You have a small menu, as restaurants go?

Kniesche: Well, we have no steaks and no chops.

Teiser: You have nothing that has to be prepared at the last minute?

Kniesche: Oh yes, we have. We have Wiener Backhuhn. That's a breaded chicken. Believe me, you don't get that nowhere in town like this. It's delicious. You get that right out of the pan.

Teiser: Do you have anything else that has to be fixed at the last minute?

Kniesche: The baked chicken, the oysters when we have oysters, or fried sole. That's all cooked to order. It comes real hot.

You know, we are not a fish house, but we sell more oysters than anyone in town! That's what they tell us where we buy the oysters.

Teiser: What kind of oysters do you get?

Kniesche: Eastern oysters.

Teiser: How do you serve them?

Kniesche: Fried. They bread 'em up and fry them and put it in the oven. It comes right out of the oven onto the plate.

Teiser: Fried and baked?

Kniesche: Well, they're baked as they are fried in deep fat. They put them in broiling hot fat. Then we make our own tartar sauce. It's not just mayonnaise. There's pickles in there and everything else--onions. It has a flavor, a good taste.

Teiser: You're making me hungry. [laughs] So you have some things prepared in advance and some things have to be prepared immediately--so your cooks don't get in a straight rush, like a short-order house.

Kniesche: No. Because there's more fried--you fry this and you fry that.

Our kitchen is clean. You should come down and see it. I wish you would come down once on a Saturday morning. Believe me, I want to tell you something, you'll be astonished, the equipment they have! The basement is scrubbed every night, and the stairs going down to the basement. Our basement is all white enamelled. Really!

Kniesche: I just had the fellow from the health department come down. He would bring people down and show them the basement. Everything is off the floor.

Teiser: You have only two salads?

Kniesche: We have shrimp salad with vegetables and lettuce. That's separate. The shrimp salad, you buy it [i.e. order it separately].

Teiser: Oh, that's a main dish.

Kniesche: Yes. The coleslaw and the potato salad come as an appetizer.

Teiser: At lunchtime, is it all a la carte, too?

Kniesche: Same deal. Same thing. I tell you, I never did believe in dinners. But then you charge less, too. We don't charge for [a whole] dinner. We charge for the dessert and extra-type things. Our prices are, anybody can eat cheap and he can make his own big dinner.

Teiser: Some places I know don't like you to order only a small meal.

Kniesche: I think the way we serve this, that's all you can eat. What you need to stay alive, not to come out like a balloon and say, 'I can't eat there--they gave me too doggone much!' When I go to eat, I take a small portion, just about a child's portion. I was raised to clean my plate. I take a child's portions, and when I finish, I could eat something more sometimes, but I don't, because I finished my plate. I tell you, that's the best system there is. Then you never get overstuffed. You don't see any fat on me.

Teiser: That's right, you're spare.

Kniesche: You see? Then you don't enlarge your stomach. Once you enlarge your stomach, you got to keep on filling it up, because you're hungry. I'm never hungry! I can go all day from morning to night. Food doesn't bother me. When people say, "Oh, I'm hungry, I'm hungry"--I'm never hungry. I think I'm a nut! [laughter]

Teiser: Maybe we can come on a Saturday and you can describe the restaurant.

Kniesche: All the pictures and everything else.

Teiser: And all your equipment. Could we do that?

Kniesche: Yes. We'd be open until twelve o'clock. We close at twelve. Saturday morning we have a crew there. They clean the floor and everything else like that, and wax the floor. We do bookwork and so forth.

Teiser: That would be interesting.

Kniesche: I think it's interesting.

Restaurant Tour

[Date of Interview: October 4, 1976, a Monday, in the afternoon, with T. Max Kniesche and T. Max Kniesche, Jr., at Schroeder's Cafe]

Teiser: [In basement storage and preparation area] This is the refrigerator.

Kniesche: For vegetables and things like that.

Teiser: Are those onions?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: What temperature do you keep that at?

Kniesche: About thirty-eight, just above freezing. Now here is a meat slicing machine for cold meats. That [a slicer] is for rye bread. That's for pumpernickel. These are the ice makers.

Teiser: You have to have special machines for slicing dark breads?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: These are all white-painted partitions.

Kniesche: Yes. Here is our grocery department.

Teiser: On a platform.

Kniesche: We have all the groceries and dried beans in here.

Teiser: Stacked in cases, boxes. Everything covered.

Kniesche: Yes. There's rice. There's sugar. [Removes lids from containers]

Teiser: In big covered cans.

Kniesche: Yes. We have it all in cans. No wood. No wood of any kind--all in tins.

Wait a minute--I have to turn the light on here. That's all MJB coffee. We have so much we can't fit it in the storeroom no more.

Teiser: You have some case goods out here. [Kniesche searches for keys] What are we going into that you keep locked?

Kniesche: Well, you'll be surprised. [laughs] You have to keep everything locked nowadays. [door opens] Wine, liquor, and the things what we need all the time.

Teiser: Like what?

Kniesche: Like equipment.

Teiser: What are those?

Kniesche: This is for the sewer. When the sewers stuff up, you have to get through there with the things down there.

We have no women employees, only men.

Teiser: So you just have a men's locker room.

Kniesche: Some day we going to get in trouble here with the women.

Here's a place for the hats.

Teiser: Clean locker room. Clean everywhere.

Kniesche: In this room is the dishes and pots and pans what we need.

Teiser: Those are the things that are not in active use?

Kniesche: They are all new. In the other room here is the soft drinks, in bottles.

Teiser: I see. [looking at laundry chute] And you have a laundry down here?

Kniesche: Well, no. We catch the napkins from upstairs. We don't wash them. We send them out to the laundry.

Here we do all our preparing. We prepare all the food down here. We cut meat and vegetables, etcetera. This is the aging box [for meat].

Teiser: This is a refrigerator, not a freezer?

Kniesche: No, it's not a freezer.

Teiser: Here are tonight's potatoes?

Kniesche: They cut them up here, whatever we need for a stew or something--they cut it.

Teiser: There's your meat grinder.

Kniesche: Yes. I tell you something, we grind our own hamburger. So we know what goes in there. When you buy it in the store, they put everything in there. We know what we put in there.

Teiser: What's this?

Kniesche: A dough mixer.

Teiser: You don't make bread here?

Kniesche: No, but we have the meat, and sometimes you have to mix it, and so on and so on. When you make potato pancakes, you have to slice the potatoes and then mix them.

Teiser: There's no way to peel potatoes but by hand?

Kniesche: No. You can do it [by machine], but you have to watch out. If you don't turn the motor off, you have no potatoes left.

Teiser: So it's better to have two men peeling potatoes?

Kniesche: It's better. Here's one of the iceboxes. But it's no freezer. It's at thirty-eight, thirty-six [degrees]. Over there in the back, that is for the sauerbraten and the things where we marinate the meat.

Teiser: You marinate it several days?

Kniesche: For three days every time. Then change the brine. This is all the corned beef. Those are empty oil cans that should be going out. They brought in the full ones, and they didn't take the empty ones out.

Teiser: Oil for frying?

Kniesche: Oil for frying and salad and so forth.

Teiser: You keep vegetables, meats, desserts--everything here. My, those are nice looking ducks!

Kniesche: This is a freezer. [opens door] These are the motors for the icebox and the refrigerator. And here's the beer.

Teirser: Oh, here's the draft beer.

Kniesche: It comes direct from here through the faucet. We have no ice up there for the beer. [sounds of whirring motors]

Teiser: You keep the metal kegs down here. How cold do you keep this room?

Kniesche: This is thirty-eight, something like that.

Teiser: And you draw the beer through these tubes?

Kniesche: Right straight up to the bar.

Teiser: No wonder it's so good and cold.

Kniesche: [laughs] That's right. This afternoon they're going to go through the whole works [cleaning up]. It will be spic-and-span here.

Teiser: What times does the cleanup crew come?

Kniesche: They are right here now.

Teiser: I see, between lunch and dinner.

Kniesche: When they are through with the potatoes, they go to work and clean everything up here.

Teiser: I see--the same men who are working on the potatoes now?

Kniesche: Yes, same men.

Teiser: Now we're going back upstairs to the main floor. What was this building before?

Kniesche: It was used by California Packing Company. It was for years and years.

Teiser: What did they use the basement for?

Kniesche: I don't know. You'd be surprised, the way that looked when we took this place over.

Teiser: What was it like?

Kniesche: Dilapidated. We pulled out every nail, everything. We pulled every thing out before we started in. We cleaned it all out.

Teiser: This main floor too?

Kniesche: Sure. There was nothing here. This is all new.

Teiser: And the kitchen--did you bring any of your equipment here with you?

Kniesche: Very little.

Teiser: This is the main floor kitchen, narrow, parallel to the dining area, separated from it by a counter. Is this an unusual shape?

Kniesche: I want to tell you something--we built it for quick action. If you can feed so many people in an hour as we do, then you have to show me that. [laughter] This goes fast. This [food] goes right on the [customer's] plate from the steam tables [just below the counter].

Teiser: Against the back wall is the refrigerator, the stove, the sink--

Kniesche: --and the dishwashing machine.

Teiser: There is another room back here, beyond this folding door partition, at the rear of the main dining area.

Kniesche: You can open it up, close it up, open it up.

Teiser: How many people will this back area hold?

Kniesche: It can hold eighty-five. We can take it up to one hundred twenty-five. Then we put the partitions out here.

Teiser: Oh, you can move them?

Kniesche: Well, we just open them up, and we put our own [i.e. another] partition in.

Teiser: How many places, in this back room as it is now, with small tables in it?

Kniesche: About eighty-five. The whole dining room is two hundred fifty.

Teiser: With this?

Kniesche: With this together, yes.

Teiser: When you have a banquet, do you put up big tables?

Kniesche: Any way they want it. We can put a big table, or we leave them small tables. Most of them, they like small tables, because when they have big tables they can't talk anyhow. This way, they're all in groups. Eight or ten, and then they can talk.

Teiser: What kind of people do you have for banquets here?

Kniesche: Business people.

Teiser: Companies?

Kniesche: Companies.

Teiser: Social clubs?

Kniesche: Sometimes, yes. Club and groups. After all, it doesn't make much difference where they all come from. Now is when they're starting, next month, before Christmas. They have big parties and get-togethers.

There is a six feet space between the building here and the building over there [at the rear].

Teiser: Is that a delivery area for you?

Kniesche: No, no. There's nobody can come in.

Teiser: It's just air.

Kniesche: The building was built that way, you know. When they put this building up, they went as far as the line went. Our property goes to the wall [of the building behind].

Teiser: So you have a little clearance there.

Kniesche: Yes, that makes it nice.

Teiser: On both sides, I suppose this building is right against the other buildings?

Kniesche: Oh, yes.

The Decorations

- Teiser: Are we going to discuss the murals now?
- Kniesche: Let's go right to the murals now.
- Teiser: We're at the back of the banquet room, looking at the mural on the right-hand side as you face toward the back.
- Kniesche: Here is the poor fellow sitting in the boat and a big heavy mama sitting in there [in the stern]. Of course, the boat is way down. [laughter] He has a hard time rowing. She just came from Schroeder's Cafe--she was eating there.
- Teiser: Yes, you can tell that. [laughter] He's almost high and dry. His oars hardly reach the water.
- Kniesche: [Looking at mural to its right, around corner: a man, a boy, and a dog by a fishing stream.] This was old man Schroeder there, years ago. That was my son and a dog when he was little. He [Richter] painted him on the canvas.
- Teiser: Did old man Schroeder and your son know each other?
- Kniesche: Oh, no. He did Schroeder from a photograph, because Schroeder was dead already when he painted them pictures.
- Teiser: Whose dog is that?
- Kniesche: That was Schroeder's dog. [laughs]
- Teiser: Did he paint your boy from life?
- Kniesche: Yes.
- Teiser: He was a good-looking youngster.
- Kniesche: He sure was.
- Teiser: How old was he there?
- Kniesche: About eight.
- Teiser: Did he like to fish, actually?
- Kniesche: He likes to fish. We used to have a boat, you know. He likes to fish.
- Teiser: He's standing there fishing in a stream.

Teiser: Now this mural is on the back wall. [two men and a woman at a tavern table]

Kniesche: That's the southern part of Germany, the Tyrol, where they play the zither and play cards, drink beer.

Teiser: The woman at right is playing the zither, and the two men are drinking beer.

This next is also on the back wall.

Kniesche: Two of them come out of the restaurant, and they had too much to drink. The dog they left it on [i.e. tied to the] lamp post. See it? [laughs]

Teiser: And the policeman is looking at them dubiously.

Now this is on the left hand side of the back room.

Kniesche: You know what that is? That's four customers.

Teiser: These are four customers?

Kniesche: Yes. Harold Nicolisen--had an export business; Murphy--don't remember what he did; Jerry Gridley--he was working for the Southern Pacific here; George Stempel--he had a bakery, Stempel's doughnuts. He [Richter] put them all in monk's robes. But they're all dead now.

Teiser: One is holding two steins of beer. They're all in a beer cellar.*

We are now at the back of the main room. This mural is on the right wall at the rear.

Kniesche: See, she falls down the stairs and he takes a look around. Then you look at those eyes! You see? They all have a meaning.

Teiser: The waitress is falling down the tavern steps and her skirt has flown up and he's looking around behind him at her.

Opposite this one is the back one on the left wall.

Kniesche: This is a schoolteacher, a minister, and a forester. They're playing cards together.

*See p. 160.

Teiser: Were they real people who came here too?

Kniesche: No, he did it by himself.

Teiser: There are some guns and a dog in the room. Is that a kind of a typical scene in Germany?

Kniesche: Absolutely! Hundred-percent! It's just the way it is.

This is a still life.

Teiser: The still life over the kitchen, on the right wall.

Kniesche: Over the kitchen. The rabbits are there, the pheasants are there. They've gathered a lobster and other food. When you look through the bowl where the food is in--see the top of the picture--you can see the shadow of the glass bowl. I tell you, he was a wonderful artist, that guy. He didn't overlook anything.

Teiser: That is the second from the back on the left wall.
This opposite it is a big group.

Kniesche: This group came in every day for lunch.

Teiser: Who are they?

Kniesche: That fellow's name, who I shake hands with--

Teiser: This is the man on the right end.

Kniesche: It's Sim Davis. Then there's myself [second from right]. Then there's Flosher, Dasher, Waldemeyer, McDonald, Schumaker. Then I can't get the name.* Then there's the professor, the painter himself. He painted himself in the mural. The one next to the waiter. [second from left]

Teiser: Then at the end is the waiter. What was his name?

Kniesche: Otto [Gieselmann]. He was an old-timer. He was here a long time. On account of him, I bought the place.

Teiser: Oh, and he went on being a waiter? He went on working for you?

*See pp. 159-160.

Kniesche: Yes, he worked for me then afterwards.

Teiser: Oh, he was the man who told you about it?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: You must have thought a lot of his judgment.

Kniesche: Well, he was an old-timer.* You know, when he had the flu, I practically saved his life. When he was laying in the hotel, nobody took care of him. I went up and took care of him. We had all flu masks at that, you know?

Teiser: Yes, the World War I flu.

Kniesche: I used to go up there. Usually I had formaldehyde on a handkerchief in there. [laughs] It was to kill the germs, but I don't know, it could have killed me! But I lived through that.

T.M.

Kniesche, Jr.: [coming in] Ladies, how do you do! How are you? Nice to see you!

Kniesche: That was the little boy in there. Don't he look like it?

Teiser: Yes, he looks like it.

Kniesche: He looks natural.

Kniesche, Jr.: Did you give them all the information about the place?

Kniesche: Yes.

Teiser: Yes, we're going right along, one mural at a time.

Kniesche, Jr.: Did he give you all the peoples' names?

Teiser: I think so. There was one man next to the artist whom he couldn't remember.

Kniesche, Jr.: Randall.

Teiser: Let's go over them again.

*See also p. 77.

Kniesche, Jr.: [right to left] Sim Davis, my father. The fellow with the soup is Mr. Floher. The man with the pipe is Mr. Dasher. Then the elderly gentleman who's head-on is Waldemeyer from the old Valley Brewery up in Stockton. The one with the beer glass in his hand is McDonald. The one with the red tie is Schumaker. The other gentleman that's toasting with the artist is [Ralph S.] Randall, who was with the Randall Paint Company. Then the artist, Herman Richter, and then the old waiter Otto Gieselmann.

Kniesche: He used to go up there when the gold rush was in Alaska, he went up in the Klondike. That really was an enterprise at that time.

Teiser: He didn't hit it rich though, I gather. He was still working.

Kniesche: Oh, no. [laughs] Very few did!

Teiser: --Again, you said that--

Kniesche, Jr.: The picture was the four monks*--the one on the right is Jerry Gridley from the Southern Pacific. He used to be the purchasing man, I think, for the Southern Pacific. Then there was a fellow by the name of Murphy. I don't know what he did. Then the fellow that's sitting down drinking the beer, with the beer stein, is Nicolisen. The man that's standing is George Stempel from the Stempel doughnut company.

Now this picture here has some humor behind it.

Teiser: This is the third from the back on the left wall of the main dining area.

Kniesche, Jr.: They're having a dice game, and naturally they always have a young fellow in shooting dice with their games and an old-timer with his pot belly sitting at the end there drinking beer, who didn't care what was keeping. This one fellow is throwing the dice out, and as you can see, the dice are just about rolling.

The old fellow with the goatee--he's next shaking dice, and you see where his left hand is, for luck?
[laughter]

Teiser: On the tavern-maid's posterior.

*See p. 157.

- Kniesche: Look at those eyes. They all have a meaning.
- Kniesche, Jr.: See the faces and the expressions of each and every one of them? They're really nice.
- Teiser: Are they real people?
- Kniesche, Jr.: No, no. Those two are the only ones that have anything real.
- Kniesche: And this one here. [third from rear on right wall of main dining area]
- Teiser: Is by the same man?
- Kniesche: No, it was a different artist.
- Kniesche, Jr.: This one was Donat Ivanovsky. He painted these for us when we moved in here in 1956.
- Teiser: They're quite different, aren't they?
- Kniesche, Jr.: Yes.
- Kniesche: You can see the difference in the eyes. There's no life in there.
- Kniesche, Jr.: He painted these three signs, which is this one here and the two up in the front.
- Teiser: Will you translate them?
- Kniesche, Jr.: This one says, "Kommt dir ins Haus ein lieber Gast. Gib's ihm so gut, als Dues hast." "If a lovely guest comes into your house, give him the best you can offer him." He did these because we didn't have any small pictures.
- Teiser: This picture is a joking one. [third from rear on right wall] The diner has got everything on the table!
- Kniesche, Jr.: This one's eating everything, and what happens is that he's still trying to pick out some more. There's another waitress bringing some more food out, and the cook is sticking his head out and saying, "Where is this guy putting all this food?" There's kind of a little story behind it. [laughter]
- Teiser: I hope he's got lots of money in that brief case beside him.

Kniesche, Jr.: Now on this [left] side, this is a student thing in Munich. They usually have their sabres and their fencing equipment. They go to one of these student halls, and a lot of these are supposedly rich sons that stay in college for the rest of their lives. They love to go to--it's not a fraternity, but it's companionship.

Kniesche: Studentcorps. They stay right with them, some of them.

Kniesche, Jr.: When we moved--you can see the line in the middle, right behind the chair to the right. That [the painting] we had to extend, so Ivanovsky, the fellow who painted this over here, painted that cat.

Teiser: Oh, he extended the room in the picture and put the cat in it. [laughter]

Kniesche: He did a good job with the cat there.

Kniesche, Jr.: Now this one over here [on the right], you'll have to come up underneath the light.

Kniesche: This is an Adam and Eve. She caught him with the apple.

Teiser: . That's a Bavarian Adam and a Bavarian Eve. Which one painted that?

Kniesche: That was the older, Richter.

Kniesche, Jr.: Now this one here [on the right wall] is a fish story. To the left is the original--he's the old fisherman. He is a salt-sea man who does a lot of fishing and everything else. The guy in the back is telling the story, how big the fish is. The fatheaded guy, he's taking it all in. He can't believe that he caught one so big. The old professor in the back there, he can't make up his mind if it's right or it's wrong.

But this fish that he caught is above him [mounted on a plaque on the wall in the painting], which is just half the size.

Teiser: That is the mural that's just beyond the bar, on the right-hand wall.

Kniesche, Jr.: Over here [next to it] we have a gal that's on a champagne bottle, and she blew the cork off the bottle.

Teiser: She did indeed! She's kind of a cancan girl.

Kniesche, Jr.: Right. Now these were done--when were they done? In '33 or '34?

Kniesche: In '34.

Teiser: Were some people shocked?

Kniesche, Jr.: I guess so. Also, this same artist, Herman Richter, did all the paintings in the taproom at the Lucky Lager Brewery, at the same time. I don't know if it's still the same way or not, but he did all the original paintings when they first opened up the Lucky Lager Brewery, right there off Third Street.

This one [sign] up here says, "Unseren lieben Gasten recht guten Appetit und ein baldiges Wiedersehen." "Our lovely guest, a right good appetite, and a soon return." That's what that one says. And the other one up in front says, "Hast Mittags Du gespeiset fein, so sehr auch Abends bei mir ein." "If you had a noonday lunch here, and enjoyed it, come back again in the evening."

Teiser: Good idea. [laughter]

Kniesche, Jr.: Now these two pictures here--

Teiser: --at the front on the left wall as you face the rear--

Kniesche, Jr.: --were done by Donat Ivanovsky. These were the fill-in pictures. This was a waiter taking beer out to the lovers in the rainy season with the umbrella in the garden, and enjoying themselves. They don't care if it's raining or not, but they still want to do their little moonlighting out there. [laughter]

This one here is a Tyrolean fellow making love with the waitress. In the back [behind them], there's two little boys poking their heads through the ivy and kind of laughing at what's going on.

Teiser: At the front are two smaller pictures.

Kniesche: [in one] They play cards over the table, and he thinks he has a good hand, that one fellow. The other fellow looks, and then [in the second picture] when he puts his cards down, he loses! See the expression there?

There's one more picture that belongs in there, but I can't get hold of it.

Teiser: Where is it?

Kniesche: I don't know. It's floating around somewhere.

Kniesche, Jr.: These sailing pictures behind the bar--

Teiser: Yes, three fine sailing vessels.

Kniesche, Jr.: Those three were given to us by an old sea captain. These are hand-painted, and they were done by Captain [L.O.] Schulze. He was the artist. They are beautiful pictures.

Teiser: An actual sea captain was the painter? I'll be darned.

Kniesche, Jr.: Yes, an actual sea captain was the painter.

Teiser: They're awfully nice, aren't they? Do you have many sea captains coming in?

Kniesche: We used to have. Now we have air captains.

Kniesche, Jr.: Here's one for the book [pointing to a big stein]. You might remember when they used to go to the grocery stores to get the beer?

Kniesche: That was a long time ago.

Kniesche, Jr.: This was the Schlitz Beer glass stein. You used to fill up at the grocery store, and you'd get the top and put it on. You get your beer, and then you go home with it. It was all pewter and everything else. This was the original Schlitz glass. This is an antique, with the label on it.

Teiser: With a cap that holds in the pressure?

Kniesche, Jr.: That's right, to hold the gas in. Then they would go home and have it, and put it in their iceboxes.

These here [photographs in a side sitting room at the front of the restaurant] are just pictures of the original owner. Henry Schroeder did a lot of hunting and got all the deer heads.

Teiser: All of them that are in the restaurant?

Kniesche, Jr.: Yes, the majority was his.

Kniesche: I show you a picture. See this picture here? And this one here-- He stands there, and on here they put him behind the bear with a knife. See, he's in the afternoon jacket! [laughter]

- Kniesche: And this thing here--they put him behind the lion.
- Kniesche, Jr.: In the original picture he was holding antlers. They put the knife in his hand and they also put the gun in his hand in place of the two antlers.
- Teiser: Oh, I see--a composite picture, a joke.
- Kniesche, Jr.: He has his watch fob on, he has everything.
- Kniesche: And a bow tie! [laughter] I have the original mock-up of this, where they broke it down. The fellow who did it is still alive. He's 98 years old. That's Ed Russ.
- Teiser: Really! He was a photoengraver.
- Kniesche, Jr.: He's a personal friend of my father's. He's the oldest living member of the Olympic Club. He comes down with his wife to have dinner. I think they've been married for over seventy years now.
- Kniesche: We used to go to Aetna Springs together every summer.
- Teiser: Well, you kept good company. I've always admired him very much.
- Kniesche, Jr.: That was the original picture.
- Teiser: With him standing holding the antlers.
- Kniesche, Jr.: See, here's the original restaurant here. Then this was during the 1939 fair, when all the employees were dressed up. There's my dad right there.
- Teiser: Everybody had on kind of forty-niners' clothes.
- Kniesche, Jr.: Forty-niners, right.
- Teiser: Looks much the same. You kept the appearance of the restaurant much the same when you moved.
- Kniesche: Yes, the same as always.
- Kniesche, Jr.: This is the picture of when women's liberation came along, and broke our glass windows out in front.
- Teiser: Those women did that?!

Kniesche, Jr.: Yes, here's a picture of it. They broke the entire thing down, all the leaded glass. It cost us about four hundred dollars for each pane of glass to be fixed, and we have two of them.

Kniesche: It wasn't them, but somebody did it. Who did it, I don't know.

Kniesche, Jr.: Well, who did it I don't know, but it happened to be during the same time.

This back bar is entirely all rosewood. That's the most beautiful--that's all solid rosewood. We picked that bar up where the old flower [market] district used to be, on Fourth and Fifth between Mission and Howard, before they moved out to their new location. The flower mart. They tore the building down, so we ran across it.

We picked that up, and brought it in here. We understand that the rosewood bar came around the Horn on a sailing ship during the 1800s. Just the pillars and the beam across. That's all rosewood and mahogany. It's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen in your life. The man who refinished it--he's an old craftsman, an old woodworker--said that it was a pleasure to work with old wood that was so beautiful.

Teiser: And the bar itself--

Kniesche, Jr.: We had it made when we moved in here.

Kniesche: It's built like a battleship. You can shake dice and bounce them on the bar and they roll very quietly.

Kniesche, Jr.: Did my dad tell you who the architect was?

Teiser: No.

Kniesche, Jr.: Well, the architect for this place was Carl Riesen. He was a personal friend of mine. Unfortunately, he died at the age of 54. He died about three or four years ago. He was a great man. He worked for Milton Pflueger and Company. He did this job on the side--evenings, weekends--and then finally took three weeks' vacation to finish up the drawings and everything else, so that we could get open.

He was a very, very magnificent architect, and did everything. The contractor and the superintendent said that they'd never seen a set of drawings like this in their lives. He was so exact in everything that he'd done. So it worked out quite well.

Kniesche, Jr.: See that beer stein over here? We have it on a revolving disk. That holds fifteen gallons, believe it or not, of beer. That's the fourth largest beer stein in the world.

Teiser: Where did it come from?

Kniesche, Jr.: Germany. They make a lot of replicas now of those steins, but they're not nearly as nice as the old ones, because you can always tell an old stein from the Delft blue--you know that dark, dark blue like those over here? The new ones don't have this blue. They don't fire the colors as well into the porcelain.

Teiser: How old do you think this is?

Kniesche, Jr.: This one? Oh, I don't know. This could be about a hundred years old. See, this is a wedding picture [on it]. All the people are dancing together. They're going to have a good time and celebration. As it turns around here, I'll show you exactly what takes place. They have a little ring-bearer--here's the ring-bearer--the bride, the bride's maid of honor and the groom, and they just got their wedding certificate. They're now going to the party and having a good time with all the rest of their friends.

Now, my mother got this. This is the old Reichsführer.

Teiser: This is a metal sculpture.

Kniesche, Jr.: This is all sculpted in heavy metal. This is the German eagle that's on here. This is the Reichsführer. This is Hindenburg, and that's his picture. He used to be a blacksmith, years ago. That's an old piece.

Here, I want to show you something.

Teiser: [reading sign above bar] "He who drinks and drinks with grace--"

Kniesche: "--is ever welcome in this place. But he who drinks more than his share is never welcome anywhere." That's a good saying. I found that somewhere, and I put it up there.

Teiser: You found it already made?

Kniesche: No, I had them made. I found that saying and liked it. [reading another] "The right to drink is ours, and we should never lose it. So long as you and I are wise and don't abuse it."

- Kniesche: [looking at old menus] You know, when I went into business here at Schroeder's, I paid for boiled beef three cents a pound. That was the price. I tell you, everything has changed. Everybody was happy. We didn't have much money, but a ten-cent piece went a long way. Beer was five cents. Whiskey was ten cents.
- Teiser: Things are pretty different now.
- Kniesche: Yes. You have more luxury, but you have more headaches.
- Teiser: How about young people? Are they different from you, when you were young?
- Kniesche: No.
- Teiser: They didn't have so much money, young people.
- Kniesche: No, they didn't. They didn't need much money. Now they have more money but everything costs more. There are more on relief.
- Teiser: When there were fewer people on relief, did you help people? You said that you would lend money to somebody who was down and out, or you'd give him something. Is that right?
- Kniesche: They asked for work and so forth. Today you can't hire anybody, because the union won't let you. When I first came, I had a couple of persons that came in and asked for a meal. I gave them a meal, because I remembered when I went hungry. I went hungry many, many times. But one told the other, and things like that. Sometimes I had twelve, fourteen sitting in the basement eating.
- So I said to myself, this is going too far. So I said, "You go down there and peel a half a sack of potatoes, and then come and get your meal." And they all said, "What's the idea?" I had nobody coming no more. They weren't that bad off. They just wanted something for nothing, see?
- Then it makes you kind of hard. Afterwards you don't care no more. Then I had people out here and there, and I'd get stuck from every one of them. That's what you have to do. If you want some money, you have to go to the banks. That's what the banks are there for. They can help you out. If you haven't got it, it's just too bad.

Kniesche: But it's been interesting, this business. Anyhow, to me. I am not alone. This I started with nothing. When I started out, I was absolutely broke like the rest of them. Then I worked myself up. I told you when I stopped gambling, from then on I got a little money together. Then I went in business.

Three Generations*

Teiser: When did your son come in with you?

Kniesche: When he was born! [laughter]

Kniesche, Jr.: I started in 1941. Then I went in the service from 1942 to 1946. November of '42 until January of '46.

Teiser: What did you do in the service?

Kniesche, Jr.: I was in the Air Force, in the training division for three years and three months. Then I was discharged and I came back in the business here and worked with Dad.

Teiser: Did you ever want to do anything else than this?

Kniesche, Jr.: No, this is what I did all my life, when I was a little youngster. On weekends and vacation time and any free time, I'd come down to the restaurant.

Teiser: You must get along well with your dad!

Kniesche, Jr.: Yes. So now I have my son in the business here. We have three generations. Not too many places have three generations.

Teiser: No. Your son didn't have to go in the service, did he?

Kniesche, Jr.: No. He's twenty-four years old now. He went to the University of Denver and studied in the hotel-restaurant management school there. He graduated, and his undergraduate work was in hotel and restaurant management and business administration. Then he stayed on for one more year and got his MBA in business at the University of Denver. He graduated in 1976

*See also pp. 142-145.

Kniesche, Jr.: He's been with us now over three years. He comes up with a few good ideas. He's always having a chance to utilize his brain now, and move along.

Teiser: It's interesting, though, having somebody come in who's studied the theories.

Kniesche, Jr.: Oh, yes. But he'd been working here on and off, on weekends and when he had time off.

Teiser: Since he was young?

Kniesche, Jr." Oh, sure. I never asked him to come in, and all of a sudden one day, he decided that he wanted to come in and work for us, so that was a great pleasure on our part. We never pushed him. He had ideas that he wanted to work for a large chain or something of this kind. Then he found out otherwise, that he would be better off coming down here. But you've got to go find out that for yourself. You can't tell people to do what they have to do.

Teiser: No. I don't see how all of you stay so slim around all this good food.

Kniesche, Jr.: Well, we eat here all the time. Our food's not fattening-- just strengthening. It doesn't add any new curves--it just fills out the ones you have. [laughter] That's a good slogan.

ca. 1936

'Eating Around'

Schroeder's

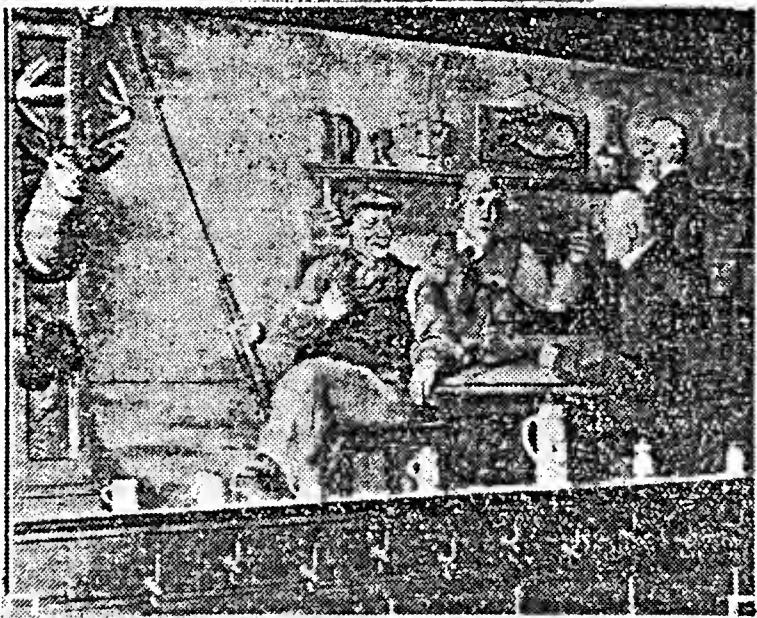
By Ruth Thompson

MAX T. KNIESCHE.
Proud of his restaurant.

Even with an escort a woman cannot eat lunch at Schroeder's Cafe, 111 Front-st, where German foods and beer served in steins are featured. But at night they are as welcome "as the flowers that bloom in the spring tra la!"

Not knowing that, I walked in as briskly as you please one noon to interview the proprietor Max T. Kniesche and was invited, against all precedent, to remain for lunch. However, though I'd love to dash around and say I'm the only woman who has ever eaten lunch at Schroeder's it was impossible for me to remain that noon and we arranged for a dinner.

Max Kniesche claims that his is the only San Francisco restaurant that has held out in barring women at the lunch hour. One by one, the old time places have succumbed. Max, with his best twinkling



Upper: An interior view of Schroeder's Cafe. Lower: A closeup of one of the murals.

approaches the hungry females when they would enter and explains they cannot be accommodated until evening.

Packed with Men

And at noon the men revel in this masculine rendezvous and crowd the place to its 185 seating capacity and probably many a stein is lifted to the German toast, "Prost!"

Schroeder's Cafe is a "survival" of one of San Francisco's old time eating houses. It was established by Henry Schroeder in 1893 on Market-st between First and Second-sts. After the fire the restaurant was moved to its present location on Front-st and the place now, though kept up-to-date in all sanitary and comfort detail, is as it was in the old days. The magnificent old bar, the long dining room with large, bare, round tables and comfortable chairs; the large, open kitchen in the center-right as one passes to the tables in the rear, and above all the German atmosphere redolent of good food and drink, are all intact.

This latter fact is due to Max Kriesche who purchased the place 14 years ago. Max, like Mr. Schroeder, was born in Germany but his travels have been varied. Having learned the restaurant business in Germany as a lad, he observed his 15th birthday in Sydney, Australia, his 16th in Yokohama, his 17th in New York and at the age of 18 he arrived in San Francisco where he has remained.

Proud of Cafe

Max has worked his way up to the ownership of this landmark and house of good German food, from the bottom. He takes a pride in his place, his staff, his food, his atmosphere and in his high class patronage.

One's attention upon entering Schroeder's is immediately arrested by the murals. From the narrow shelves that line the high walls to the ceiling, are almost life-sized oil paintings. The shelves themselves have an imposing and interesting display of steins of every variety.

The murals, painted by Herman Richter who came from Berlin two years ago, have a German motif as well as a local one. Particularly notable is the one showing a group of customers who have dined daily there for many years. They are being served by one of the waiters and Mr. Kriesche himself is shown greeting a guest. At a table under that very painting these same men may be seen practically every noon.

Game Mounted

At the back of the dining room Mr. Schroeder is pictured at his favorite sport, fishing. And trophies of his hunting prowess are seen in the form of mounted deer heads and ducks attached to the panels between the different themes. Over the open kitchen is a picture of the kitchen in action and next to it is an interesting still life of foods and fruits.

Though women are not allowed at noon in this last stronghold of men, there are several quite lively paintings of the fair sex that caught my eye but as I was the only woman present I didn't have the nerve to examine them too closely.

Every day has its specialties on the menu but the restaurant is closed Saturday nights, all Sundays and holidays. For instance, one may be sure on Monday noon to find wiener roastbraten spatzeln and schweizer bratwurst with red cabbage; Tuesday: wiener backhuhn, and schmorbraten with potato pancakes; Wednesday: garlic sausage with lentils and roast duck and red cabbage; Thursday: baked spareribs with sauerkraut and oxtail saute with vegetable; Friday: sauer beef with potato pancakes and pig knuckles. These are but a few of the items from which one may choose.

The Saturday noon I was there Hungarian goulash and noodles and wiener schnitzel were on the menu.

The menu the evening we returned for dinner was delightfully different and good in the plain, German style. Though we had wide choice, this is the dinner I enjoyed:

DINNER AT SCHROEDER'S

Dry Martini Cocktail	Cole Slaw Salad
Rye Bread	Pumpernickel Bread
Olives	Butter
Lentil Soup	Celery
Liver Dumplings	Sauerkraut
Cheese Cake	Boiled Potato

Beer	Coffee
------	--------

My companion, in place of the liver dumplings, chose roulade beef. Mashed potatoes and carrots and peas were served with the dish. I tasted the beef as well as the liver dumplings and found the flavors and delicacy were all that could be desired. The sauces or gravies on both were most tasty.

The cole slaw salad had some onion in it, while the lentil soup, heavy and nourishing, had a garnish of what I thought at first were sliced mushrooms, but Max told me they were weiners.

In place of the cheese cake I could have had other types of pastry but naturally it was a case of having the meal completely in keeping, and cheese cake was a natural to complete the meal.

Bear was the perfect beverage and was a most harmonizing accompaniment for the savory German flavors.

For the Ladies

I noted during the evening visit there were some concessions in honor of the feminine contingent. One of them was a soft rug which ran the length of the room down the aisles between tables. And I seemed to sense, too, the appreciation of the women customers. With their escorts they enjoyed the hospitality of Schroeder's that evening with a realization that it has been for the past 14 months' only they have been admitted.

Max told me the men who thronged the place at noon boasted so much at home of their lunch hour that he was besieged with calls to open his doors in the evening, at least, to admit the girls to share the treat.

Recipes Max gave me are those that are used not only at his place of business, but in his own home which assures their practicability. In fact, Mrs. Kriesche herself brought these to me, and as one was the liver dumplings I am particularly glad to share them:

LIVER DUMPLINGS

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. calves' liver	Dash poultry seasoning
1 cup bread crumbs	1 cup milk or water
1 egg	Little nutmeg
1 tsp. grated onion	Pepper to taste
	1 tsp. salt
	Grated lemon rind

Method: Skin liver and chop fine. Cook breadcrumbs and milk or water until it is a smooth paste. Remove from fire. Add beaten egg, grated onion, poultry seasoning, nutmeg, pepper and salt. Mix well. Add chopped liver and grated lemon rind. When well-mixed form into small balls about half-egg size. Drop into boiling salted water and cook for 10 minutes.

Note: Chicken liver may be used. Serve liver dumplings with this sauce:

CAPER SAUCE

2 cups stock in which 2 tbsp. flour	dash capers—any desired
dumplings were cooked or	amount but 1 cup
stock	would be good for
1 tbsp. butter or	this amount
other shortening	

Method: Mix flour and shortening to a paste. Stir in some of the hot stock and thoroughly dissolve. Add this to the cooking stock and cook for 10 minutes. Add capers just before serving.

Note: One may add tomato sauce or paste for tomato flavor, if desired.

SAUERBRATEN

Choice cut of beef	carrots, parsnips,
Mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ water	garlic, thyme,
and $\frac{1}{2}$ vinegar	Raisins
Cut onions, celery.	

Method: Place beef piece in a deep non-metal container and pour the vinegar and water mixture over it. Add the cut vegetables and allow all to stand together for 48 hours.

Method: When ready to cook proceed as with a pot roast by removing meat from vinegar mixture and browning well on all sides in the fat. Strain liquid in which meat was soaked. Pour it over the browned meat and cook meat until tender. The gravy may be thickened with flour and crushed gingersnap if desired and poured over the slices when serving.

Serve with noodles or potato pancakes.

The City

Max

It's great to be a celebrity and 90, but he misses the sociable old days

By Jim Wood

More than 800 nostalgic-dressed diners crowded into Schroeder's while television cameras caught the action and newly-widowed Max Knaeche smiled and smiled and smiled.

"Another day like this and I wouldn't be here," cracked Knaeche. "I'm a regular celebrity."

When you receive more than 500 birthday cards or when Herb Cien tells people you'll be 80 soon and gives the date, or United Press International carries your picture and touts your potato pancakes — well, face it, you are a regular celebrity.

Knaeche handled it with the twinkling aplomb learned in 70 years in the San Francisco food business. He bobbed his head and told customers graciously: "I'm 90 years young."

And the customers ate it up like so much sauerbraten gizziting at the little souvenir glass boots with the made-in-Germany seal on the head, ordering another perfect martini from Werner Spranger who's been a Schroeder's Cafe waiter — which means among the best in town — for more than 30 years.

After it was over, Knaeche said he'd enjoyed the party, but over one of his famous cheesecakes he acknowledged an appreciation for the old days when

San Francisco businessmen would linger with a glass of beer at Schroeder's and transact their business in a leisurely way after a good lunch.

"The sociability is gone," he mused. "With the oldtimers it's the same as it used to be, but the young ones, they don't know what good food is. In the first place, they didn't get it at home."

Knaeche says he was raised "with discipline, love and affection" in Naumberg, Germany, one of nine children. He excelled in geography and mathematics and at 15 left home to see the world as a sailor. China, Australia, Italy, he visited them all, but when he landed in New York in 1906 and crossed the United States to San Francisco, he knew he'd found what he was looking for.

"This was God's country," he recalls. "In all the towns I visited all over the world, this was it. I didn't want to travel anymore. San Francisco was a beautiful city, and nice" — he says the word with warmth — "the people were nice."

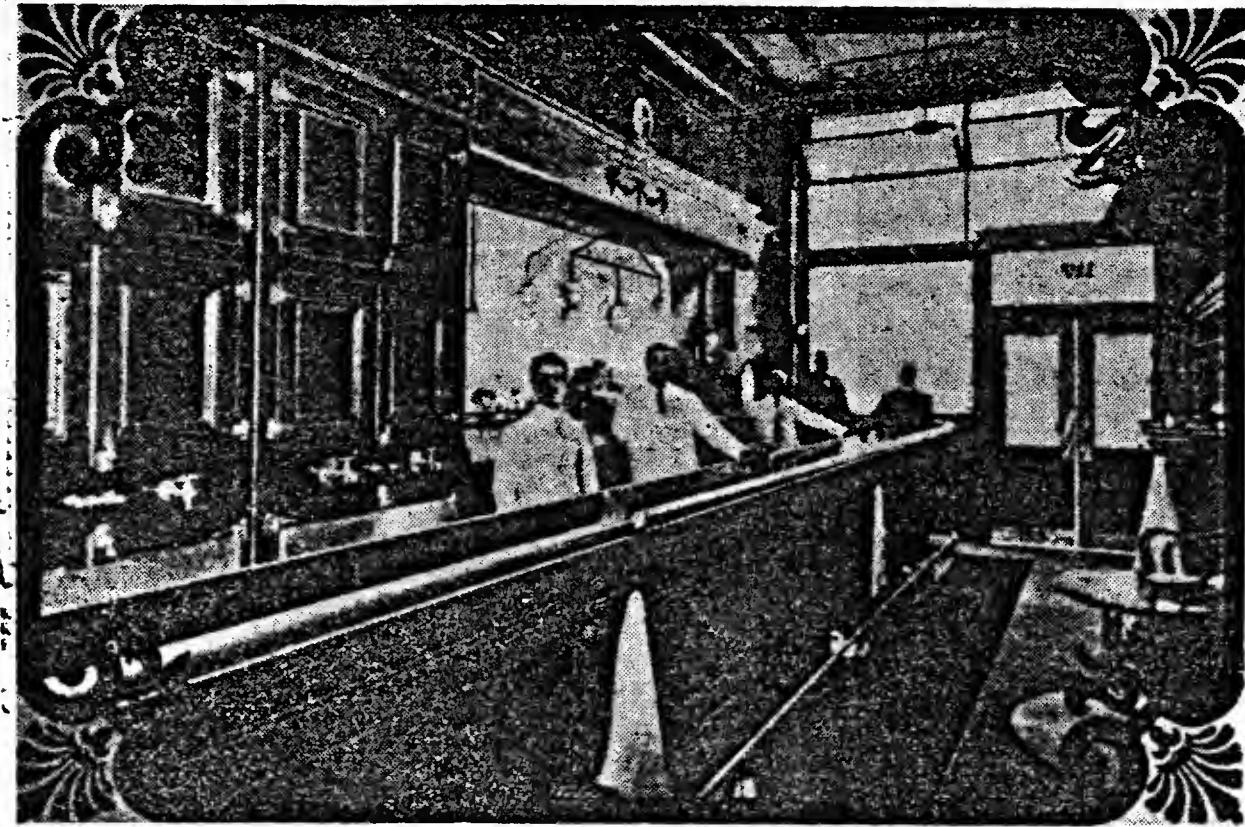
Knaeche recalls palm trees and uncluttered streets, a pre-development city just shaking off the effects of a devastating earthquake.

He soon found work as a waiter; the Heidelberg on

—See Page 4, Col. 1

Examiner/Judy Carlson





Schroeder's Cafe in 1911, when it was at 117 Front St.

City's friend in the food business

—From Page 1

Turk near Van Ness, the Bombay Garden on Van Ness near O'Farrell, the Bismarck Cafe at Fourth and Market, and, eventually, Beth's Cafe at Stockton and Market street streets.

"The proprietor died, the place belonged to a brewery, and with a few other waiters we took it over. The day we opened, we had \$50 in the till, but right from the start we were a success. We knew what to do."

Kniesche takes a bite of cheesecake.

"I made pretty good money there and then Prohibition came along and I was out of business."

Kniesche decided to chuck it, go back to Germany and then try his luck in South America. His former partners continued to operate, he says, and one made a quarter million dollars only to lose it on the stock market.

In Germany, Kniesche read a newspaper article that was to change his life. Henry Schroeder, the 6'4" former Prussian guard who owned one of the city's oldest and best restaurants, had died.

"That was the only place that could have brought me back," he says.

Schroeder's Cafe opened in 1893 on the south side of Market between First and Second streets. Destroyed by the 1906 earthquake and fire, it was temporarily relocated at 16th and Mission, where the armory now stands, moving to the rebuilt financial district in 1911.

The cafe operated first at 117 Front, moving next door to 111 Front in 1916.

Kniesche bought the restaurant from Mrs. Schroeder and has been prospering ever since, using the same traditional German recipes that made the cafe famous.

After 40 years at 111 Front St., the restaurant moved to 240 Front, its present location, doubling the capacity to the present 250 persons.

But the restaurant kept its old-time atm

The life sized murals painted by Herman Richter in 1932, the beer steins, the old fashioned coat and hat hooks, cane chairs, blackboards with the bill of fare and the traditional rosewood-mahagony bar — all stayed with the business.

And why did Schroeder's prosper when so many San Francisco restaurants failed over the years?

"Hard work and honesty," Kniesche answers. "You can't get it by cheating. I'll explain it all to you on my 100th birthday."

THE FAMOUS GERMAN DRINKING SONG

Schnitzelbank K

IST DAS NICHT EINE



SCHNITZEL BANK?

(JA, DAS IST EINE SCHNITZEL BANK!)



KURZ UND LANG



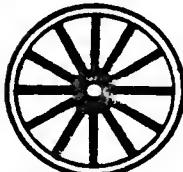
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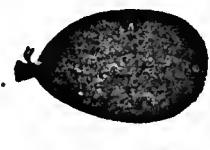
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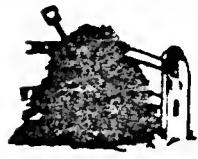
STEIN OF BIER



GROSSES GLAS



OXEN BLAS



HAUFEN MIST



SCHNICKEL FRITZ



DICKIE FRAU



FETTE BAU



LANGER MANN



TANNENBAUM



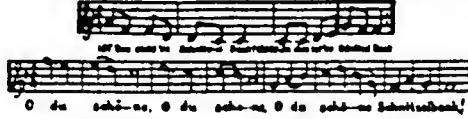
HOCHZEITS RING



GEFAehrLICHES DING

HOW TO SING THE SCHNITZELBANK

In the second verse the leader points to Kurs and Lang on the chart and sings, "Ist das nicht ein Kurs und Lang?" The chorus answers, "Ja, das ist ein Kurs und Lang!" All, "Kurs und Lang, Schnitzelbank, O die Schoeheit an der Wand, Ja, das ist eine Schnitzelbank." In the third verse the leader points to Hin and Her and asks the question. After the chorus has answered, all chant "Kurs und Lang, Hin und Her, Schnitzelbank, O die Schoeheit," etc.



O du sché-na, O du sché-na, O du sché-na Schnitzelbank!

Historical Schroeder's Cafe

SINCE 1893

FAmous FOR GERMAN COOKING

40 FRONT STREET

• GARfield 1-4778

• SAN FRANCISCO 11, CALIFORNIA
ca. 1979



INDEX -- T. Max Kniesche

Acme Brewery, 73, 83
Adler, Kurt, 132
Aetna Springs, 126, 128, 165
Albany Hotel, Colorado Springs, 28
Almax, boat, 134
Almax II, boat, 109, 134, 142
Antlers Hotel, Colorado Springs, 28
Ash, Paul, 54-55

Bad Kössen resort hotel, 2-5, 15, 17A
Barbagelata, John, 104
Barbarroosa (ship), 7-13
Barden, Monte, 54
Becker, Adolph, 98
Belvedere, Hotel, New York, 20
Beth, Adolph E., 53-54
Beth's Cafe, San Francisco, 47, 53-54, 57, 66, 77A
Bismarck Cafe, San Francisco, 36, 41, 44, 45-49, 52, 98
Bismarck Cafe, Cleveland, 25
Bismark (ship), 14
blacks. See Negroes
Bremen (ship), 11
Brown Palace Hotel, Denver, 27

California Bakery, 90
Charles'Fashion Restaurant, San Francisco, 136
Childs restaurant, New York, 20
Clinton Cafeteria, San Francisco, 84

Dasher, ___, 158, 160
Davis, Sim, 158, 160
Del Monte Meat Company, 139
Denver, 25-28
Dreamland Rink, 133

Eckert, Bill (Billy), 15, 17A
Elite restaurant, San Francisco, 58, 60
Ernst, Hugo, 52-53

Fantasia bakery, 90
 Floher, ___, 158, 160

gambling, 25, 31-32, 40, 41-42, 44, 46, 47, 126, 169
 general strike of 1934, 137-138
George W. Elder, (ship), 31
 German restaurants, passim
 German Waiters' Club, 51
 Gieselmann, Otto, 77, 158, 160
 Goertz, Henry, 26, 28
 Golden Gate International Exposition, 75, 84, 85, 86, 116-117, 165
 Gridley, Jerry, 157, 160

Heidelberg restaurant, San Francisco, 38-39, 91
 Hendschel, George, 43-44, 63
 Henry's Fashion Restaurant, San Francisco, 136
 Herbert, Albert, 74
 Herbert, Conrad, 74
 Herbert's restaurant, San Francisco, 72, 73
 Hirsch, H.L., 48-49
 Hof Brau restaurant, 49, 53
 Hollanden Hotel, Cleveland, 24, 25
 horse races. See gambling

immigrants, early 20th century, 19, 20, 23, 24, 35
 Ivanovsky, Donat, 86, 161-163

jitneys, 130-131

Kaiseren Maria Theresa (ship), 6-7, 13
 Kluge, Martin, 53, 56, 57, 60-62
 Kniesche, Alma Manegold (Mrs. T. Max), 33, 44, 45, 55, 61, 63-68, 72,
 76, 108, 109, 117, 122-124, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 134, 137, 138, 144, 167
 Kniesche, Betty Ann Jenkel (Mrs. T. Max II), 109
 Kniesche, Christine Killian (mother of T. Max Kniesche), 1
 Kniesche family, 68-69
 Kniesche, Linda, 109
 Kniesche, Lisa, 109
 Kniesche, T. Max II, ("Junior"), 67, 74, 109, 110, 115-116, 117, 121, 124,
 134, 142-144, 145, 156, 159-167, 169-170
 Kniesche, T. Max III ("Skippy"), 107, 109, 109, 116, 121, 131, 134, 141,
 144-145, 169-170; and interview sections in italics
 Kniesche, William (father of T. Max Kniesche), 1, 68
 Knowland, Tom, 32
Koenigen Louisa (ship), 18
 Kopp, Quentin, 104

Landes, Herbert, 113
Leopold (Prince), 16
Lindstrom, Frank, 53-54, 56, 61
Loehmann's Hotel, Long Island, 23
Los Angeles, 28, 29-31, 29-40
Louis' Fashion Restaurant, San Francisco, 136
Luchow's restaurant, New York, 24, 75
Lucky Lager beer, 110-111
Lucky Lager Brewery, 85, 163

magnasite tiles, 62, 63, 69-71
Manegold, Joseph, 64-65
Manegold, Mrs. Joseph, 64-65
Mardikian, George, 135, 136-137
Marquard Cafe, San Francisco, 83-84
Marquard, Harry, 83-84
Marquis, F.L. Canac, 33, 123
McDonald, ___, 158, 160
McDonald's restaurants, 121
Meyerfield, Morris, 98
Miller brothers, 45, 47
Monterey, 43, 44
Moreggia & Son, 140
Mount Tamalpais railroad, 66, 129
Murphy, ___, 160

near-beer, 83, 84
Negroes, 51
New York City, 7, 19-24, 63-64, 125
Nicholas, Eugene, 127
Nicolisen, Harold, 157, 160
Nurnberg restaurant, San Francisco, 54, 56-57, 60, 88

Odeon restaurant, San Francisco, 97, 98
Office Restaurant, New York, 22
opera, 131-133

"Painless Parker," 30
Palace Hotel, 84
Palace restaurant, Los Angeles, 30
Panama Pacific International Exposition, 32, 47, 50, 125, 130
Paris Louvre restaurant, San Francisco, 97
Persing, ___, 41
Point Sur, 43-44
Pompeian Gardens restaurant, San Francisco, 34, 38
Prince Eitel Fredrick (ship), 15
Prince Siegesmund (ship), 5
Prohibition, 57-62, 73, 82-84, 88, 100

racetracks, Bay Area, 31-32, 126
Randall, Ralph S., 159, 160
restaurant strike of 1936, 135-136. See also unions
Richter, Herman, 85-86, 156-163 passim
Riesen, Carl, 166
Roberts Turkey Brand Corned Meats, 140
Russ, Ed, 165
Russia-Japanese war, 13, 16, 17

sand fleas, 63
Savant, Silvio, 54
Savoy Hotel, Denver, 26
Schreiber, Barney, 32
Schroeder, Henry, 72, 75, 77, 80, 90, 156, 164-165
Schroeder, Mrs. Henry, 72, 76-77, 78
Schroeder's Cafe, 45-46, 47, 53, 57, 62, 64, 72-170 passim
Schumaker, ___, 160
Shell Mound Park, 125, 131
States Restaurant, San Francisco, 49
Stempel, George, 157, 160
streetcar strike of 1907, 33
strikes, 135-136, 137-138

Tadich Grill, San Francisco, 96
Tait-Zinkand restaurant, San Francisco, 38
Tait's Cafe, San Francisco, 33-34, 36-37, 38, 45, 52, 136
taxes, 103-105, 110

unions, 30-31, 49-50, 51, 52-53, 135-136, 137-138, 168
Uri, F., Company, 139

Valley Brewery, Stockton, 160
Voyages
 Bremenhaven to Sydney, Australia, 7-12
 Bremenhaven to New York, 6-7, 13, 18
 Bremenhaven to China and Japan, 13-17

Waldemeyer, ___, 158, 160
Western Women's Bank, 94
Weinhardt Brewery, Portland, Oregon, 53-54
Wheel and Whitman restaurant, New York, 21-22
Wiedemann, Fritz, 141
women's lib, 74, 89, 94-95, 117, 165-166
World War I, 58-60, 141, 159
World War II, 59-60, 71, 117-118, 139, 141, 169

yachting, 109-110, 134-135

Ruth Teiser

Born in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since. Stanford University, B.A., M.A. in English; further graduate work in Western history. Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and business and social life of the Bay Area. Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle, 1943-1974.



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